HIST 890-005 Digital History: Trends, Challenges and the Future of the Historical Method

Spring semester 2014 at UNC Chapel Hill
Days & Times: W 4:00PM – 6:50PM
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Overall concept

What will history be like in an ever more computerized and connected world? Historians, librarians and archivists are exploring new ways to publish sources, to study them and to share the results of their work. All these efforts can be linked to the umbrella term "Digital History". This course will explore how software and the internet are currently reshaping the field of history.
The course consists of three segments. The first segment will look at new ways for historians to communicate with each other and to share the results of their research with peers, and more importantly, with non-professionals. Do blogs and social media lead to sloppy and superficial work, as some critics claim? What effects do online social networks

have on academic communication? Are we entering a period of collaborative history-writing as others claim?

The second part will examine the changing nature of historical sources in the digital age. We will engage with software tools and explore how they are used by historians. How does software relate to the traditional triad of hermeneutics, source-criticism and interpretations? Can history be computed? What role do digital archives, online research platforms and network visualisations have to play here? What role will public history and crowdsourcing play in future research projects?

In the third segment students will be working in small groups on their own Digital History projects. Students can choose whether they (1) transform an existing historical narrative into a digital narrative, (2) use network analysis to study online academic communication, (3) explore the conceptual frameworks behind online research platforms or (4) develop their own project. Three sessions are reserved for this project, the results will be presented in the final session.

The course is accompanied by a Wordpress-website which will collect student output during the course and serve as an archive of the course and its materials.

This course is built around readings, short student presentations, hands-on tests with software tools and interactions with practitioners.

Please note:
This course is designed to provide historians with a first overview of the field of Digital History. No technical skills are required, and successful completion of the course does not require the development of any advanced technical skills.

Learning outcomes

Students will get an overview of how the historical disciplines adapt to the digitization of sources and to increased connectivity between scholars. They will become familiar with current debates in the field and gain practical experience with online communication and publication tools. Finally, through group work they will hone their skills in collaborative project work and study closely an element of Digital History of their choosing. This course has three objectives: (1) to provide students with a critical view on recent developments in Digital History, (2) to prepare them for their own projects in the field and (3) to provide them with transferable skills in social media communication and the analysis of digital contents.

Assignments

Student performance will be evaluated based on oral presentations, project work in small groups and its written documentation.

Students are expected to give 10 minute topical introductions to two sessions as well as one technical introduction to a software tool of their choosing (see the list below). These presentations will account for 30% of the final grade.

The group project and its presentation and documentation will account for 50% of the final grade. The written documentation of the group project should amount to 3.500 words per group member.

Finally, students will take turns as session notetakers and produce a 600 word summary on each session, the discussion and presentations which will be published on the group blog. This will account for another 20% of the final grade.

Students are also expected to submit a 500 word blog post for each session in the course. These posts should reflect on the readings and contain 2-3 questions per assigned text for class discussions and need to be published at least 12 hours ahead of the next session.

A few words about myself

I studied cultural history at the universities of Augsburg, Germany and Manchester, United Kingdom with a focus on the history of the Second World War. I have a strong interest in interdisciplinary and computational research methods in the Humanities and History in particular. In previous projects I consulted Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe (CVCE), Luxembourg on a network-based tool for the analysis of digitized primary sources and worked on event extraction from Dutch and US newspapers together with a team of Computational linguists at Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands. In July 2012 I successfully defended my PhD thesis which introduces a relational perspective to the analysis of help for persecuted Jews during the Holocaust. This is the to-date first formalized analysis of relations between helpers and recipients of help and among the first projects which apply formal network methods in Contemporary History.

As a side project I developed the website http://historicalnetworkresearch.org which bundles information on network analysis in the historical disciplines and established a workshop series on the topic together with colleagues. Over the last years these efforts succeeded and resulted in a steadily growing international network.

During my Postdoc at UNC CH I will work on MERIT - Machine-based Extraction of Relations in Text, a research project developed together with Antal van den Bosch of Radboud University Nijmegen. MERIT utilizes tools developed in Computational linguistics for a multiperspective analysis of eye-witness accounts of end of the Second World War in the Arnhem/Nijmegen region and for the comparative analysis of memories of these events.

You will find more info on my work here: http://martenduering.com and here: @martenduering.

Sessions

Introduction: What is Digital History?

Introduction to the course: we will attend to some organizational matters and then start by opening the discussion over what stands behind the notions of Digital Humanities and Digital History. Can they be defined?

Required Readings
- Edward L. Ayers: The Pasts and Futures of Digital History, http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/PastsFutures.html.

- Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig: Digital History. Introduction, http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/introduction/.

- The Digital Humanities Manifesto: http://manifesto.humanities.ucla.edu/2009/05/29/the-digital-humanities-manifesto-20/

- Florian Schneider: Why Digital Humanities, http://www.politicseastasia.com/research/digital-nationalism/digital-humanities/

- Stephen Ramsay: On Building, http://stephenramsay.us/text/2011/01/11/on-building/

- Daniel J. Cohen: New Directions in Digital History, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZWnKuhoPXU&feature=youtube_gdata_player

- Alan Liu: The state of the digital humanities: A report and a critique, http://ahh.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/11/30/1474022211427364.full.pdf+html

- Alan Liu: Where is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities, http://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/debates/text/20

- Interchange: The Promise of Digital History, http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/issues/952/interchange/index.html

Additional Resources

- Tim Hitchcock: Academic History Writing and its Disconnects, http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/files/jdh_1_1.pdf

- Anthony Grafton: Future Reading. Digitization and its discontents, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/11/05/071105fa_fact_grafton?currentPage=al.
- Alan Liu: Digital Humanities course syllalbus http://eng236introdh2013f.pbworks.com/w/page/67396717/Schedule (collects essential readings and is a great starting point).

Academic Communication: Is there a digital revolution?
Hailed by many and frowned upon by others, blogs and most social media platforms have become an important tool for historians. In this session we will discuss how this affects

scholarly communication as such and will take a close look at the practices of digital communications among historians.

Required Readings
- Alex Sayf Cummings and Jonathan Jarrett: Only Typing? Informal Writing, Blogging and the Academy, http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu/collaborative/cummings-jarrett-2012-spring/
- Go to http://hnn.us/blog/9665 and select 5 blogs which are close to your interests/previous studies. Make sure that your selected blogs are frequently updated. Read at least 10 blog posts per blog including the comment section. Learn about who is writing them, their motivations, topics, expectations and experiences. Prepare answers to the following questions: How do blogs differ from traditional forms of scholarly exchange? How do you rate the quality of your blogs and the discussion in the comments?
- Go through the Twitter history (1 week back) of 5-10 users which use the #twitterstorians hashtag. Again, select them according to your own interests in history. What do they tweet about? What gets retweeted?

In class
- Discussion of the #twitterstorians network (will be provided)

Tools of the week
- Academia.edu, LinkedIn

Publications: The future of the historical narrative
How will the historical narrative change in the digital age? Until recently, historians typically published papers and monographs, typically authored by themselves. Public engagement, apart from the occasional newspaper articles, has rarely been their preferred way of sharing the results of their work. But new ways of making these results available are emerging. Software opens up new ways of displaying text and enhancing it with other media. How do these digital texts that are no longer "set in print" change the way we read and write history?

Required Readings
- Hayden White: The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory, https://www2.southeastern.edu/Academics/Faculty/jbell/white.pdf
- Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki: Writing History in the Digital Age. Introduction and How this book evolved, http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu/introduction-2012-spring/
- John Unsworth: Documenting the Reinvention of Text: The Importance of Failure, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=jep;view=text;rgn=main;idno=3336451.0003.201
- Sherman Dorn: Is (Digital) History More Than an Argument about the Past?, http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu/revisioning/dorn-2012-spring/
- Stefan Tanaka: Pasts in a Digital Age, http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu/revisioning/tanaka-2012-spring/

- Edward L. Ayers: History in Hypertext, http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/Ayers.OAH.html
- Explore http://wechoosethemoon.org: What are the site's strengths and weaknesses? Is this a historical narrative? Why yes, why no?
- Play the Past: http://www.playthepast.org/?p=3622 (Articles TBA)
- Miles Klee: 6 students created this stunning virtual tour of 17th-century London, http://www.dailydot.com/gaming/virtual-3d-tour-17th-century-london/
- Michael Wesch: The Machine is Us/ing Us (Final Version), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLlGopyXT_g
- Michael Wesch, Information R/evolution: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4CV05HyAbM
- Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig: Digital History. Owning the Past, http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/copyright/

Further Reading
- Andreas Johnsen, Ralf Christensen and Henrik Moltke: Good Copy, Bad Copy: http://www.goodcopybadcopy.net/

Tools of the week

- Framapad, Commentpress and Google Docs
- Zotero

Digital Archives: Excursion, details TBA

What does it take to get a digitized copy of a historical source on the internet? In this session we will discuss the practicalities of digitization with experts. We will also look at other digital archives worldwide and explore the new possibilities they offer for researchers.

Required Readings
- Alan Liu: Escaping History. New Historicism, Databases, and Contingency, http://liu.english.ucsb.edu/wp-includes/docs/writings/local-transcendence-book/chap9-escaping-history-ms-version.pdf
- archive.org
- Daniel J. Cohen: Is Google good for History?, http://www.dancohen.org/2010/01/07/is-google-good-for-history/
- Daniel J. Cohen: The Future of Preserving the Past, http://chnm.gmu.edu/essays-on-history-new-media/essays/?essayid=39
- Daniel J. Cohen: Treading Water on Open Access, http://www.dancohen.org/2012/09/25/treading-water-on-open-access/
- Richard Cox: Machines in the Archive. Technology and the coming transformation of archival reference, http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/2029/1894

Tool of the week
- http://www.delpher.nl/, http://trove.nla.gov.au/,
- Europeana, http://www.europeana.eu/
- http://www.hathitrust.org/

From sources to data to databases
...
Databases are at the heart of Digital History in the same way as written notes are in traditional historical research. Their purpose is simple: Allow the storage and retrieval of information. In this session we will discuss the place of databases in Digital History, what sets them apart from written notes and build a small relational database using SQL.

Required Readings
- Ansley T. Erickson: Historical Research and the Problem of Categories: Reflections on 10,000 Digital Notecards, http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu/data/erickson-2012-spring/
- John Theibault: Visualizations and Historical Arguments, http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu/evidence/theibault-2012-spring/

Tool of the day
- SQL

DH Press: Creating digital narratives
In this session we will look at the practice of digital storytelling and its potential for historians. Members of UNC's Digital Innovation Lab have developed their own tool: DH Press. We will discuss the concept behind it, its applications today as well as plans for future developments with those who built it.

- Frederick W. Gibbs and Trevor J. Owens: The Hermeneutics of Data and Historical Writing, http://writinghistory.trincoll.edu/data/gibbs-owens-2012-spring/
- DH Press Documentation, http://dhpress.org/docs/
- Pamella Lach: A Guide to Developing Digital Oral History Projects using DH Press, Part 1, http://digitalinnovation.unc.edu/2013/10/10/oral-history-guide-part1/
- Pamella Lach: A Guide to Developing Digital Oral History Projects using DH Press, Part 2, http://digitalinnovation.unc.edu/2013/10/10/oral-history-guide-part2/
- Robert Allen: Going to the Show, http://docsouth.unc.edu/gtts/
- The Long Women's Movement, http://dhpress.org/mapping-the-long-womens-movement/

Digital Research Platforms: Merging sources and analysis
Digital Research Platforms go one step further than the archives we discussed in the previous session. They make primary sources available but also provide computational tools for their exploration and aggregation: Ranging from annotations to network visualisations they want to offer their users innovative ways to do their research. Does this work? And can tools become arguments, as some scholars claim? How have advances in technology changed Digital Research Platforms?

- Circulation of Knowledge and Learned Practices in the 17th-century Dutch Republic, http://ckcc.huygens.knaw.nl/epistolarium/

- Mapping the Republic of Letters, http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/
- CUbRIK, http://www.cubrikproject.eu/
- RemDoc, http://remdoc.huygens.knaw.nl/
- Lab1100 / SpInTime, http://spinnet.eu/spintimemappings
- ORBIS, http://orbis.stanford.edu/
- The Valley of the Shadow, http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/
- Pelagios, http://pelagios-project.blogspot.com/

Historical Network Research

Network visualisations are increasingly common not only in the realm of the Digital Humanities but as means for data exploration and data illustration in general. In this session we will take another look at the #twitterstorians network and explore it using NodeXL, a visualisation software which is particularly useful for beginners. What lies behind the aesthetics of network visualisations? How can we represent complex social relations visually? How can we represent ambivalence, context knowledge and interpretation in a graph?

- Intro to NodeXL, https://nodexl.codeplex.com/
- Read Scott Weingart's Networks Demystified series 1-8:
  http://www.scottbot.net/HIAL/?p=39600
- Claire Lemercier, Formal Methods in History. Why and How?, http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/64/93/16/PDF/lemercier_A_zg.pdf
- Claire Lemercier, Taking time seriously. How do we deal with change in historical networks, link TBA

Tool of the day:
- http://gephi.org/

Can we compute History?

Not only historians have been tempted by the idea to apply statistics to history. Fields like Quantitative History are past their heydays and are out of fashion today. Today, concepts such as Complexity Theory, Computer Simulations and fields like Computational Linguistics have taken their place. What do they have to offer to historians? Is this a fad or can they teach us something new about history? And finally: Do historians need to know how to code?

- Do some research on the meaning of "digital" and "computational". How do the two terms relate to each other?
- Jean-Baptiste Michel et al.: Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books, http://www.sciencemag.org/content/331/6014/176.abstract
- Erez Lieberman Aiden and Jean-Baptiste Michel: What we learned from 5 million books,
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpprpROySZc&feature=youtube_gdata_player
- Stylometry, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stylometry
- Juola et al.: Future Trends in Authorship Attribution,
  http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-0-387-73742-3_8

- Konrad H. Jarausch: Quantitative Methods for Historians: A Guide to Research, Data, and Statistics (Introduction), link TBA
- Ted Underwood: How not to do Things with Words, http://tedunderwood.com/2012/08/25/how-not-to-do-things-with-words/
- Peter Turchin: Cliodynamics, http://cliodynamics.info/. Read through the website. What is his approach to history? Which strengths and weaknesses can you detect?
- Complete the Exam at http://www.codecademy.com/de/tracks/python

Tool of the week
- Serendipomatic
- VOSviewer

Project Session I

Current practices in Digital History can only be understood up to a point by passive study. The rest of the course is therefore dedicated to hands-on mini projects which will be located in the realm of Digital History and be based on one or more practices discussed in the previous sessions. You are expected to work together in groups of 2-3 and to pick one of the topics below or - ideally - develop your own mini project.

Suggested Topics
- Develop your own! Or...
- Collect and study the #digitalhistory Twitter network and compare it to the #twitterstorians network.
- Write a detailed review of three Digital Research Platforms, assessing their value for historians. Include interviews with developers, users and based on project documentations.
- The Shadows of History: There should have been an immense buzz around Harriet Quimby following April 16 1912: she was the first woman to cross the English channel by aeroplane. But since the Titanic had sunk only the previous day, her achievement was barely noticed by the world. Which other events have been pushed into the shadows of history? Tell their story and how it relates to their time. Help shape the future of the historical narrative and transform a traditional historical narrative (based on digitized sources or one of your theses, papers) into a digital narrative, making use of video, social media using DH Press.

Each group will receive guidance and additional materials to help them complete their project.

Project Session II

Project Session III

Project Session IV - Preparation of project presentations and course recap

Project Presentations and conclusion
Group project presentations.

More tools
Pick one of the tools and prepare a 10 minute presentation on its purpose, including a short demo and a discussion on its value for historical research.
- Zotero
- Evernote, etc
- Framapad, Commentpress and Google Docs
- Academia.edu, LinkedIn
- Serendipomatic
- Teamviewer
- Omeka
- VOSviewer

Many more tools can be found in the collections below. If you decide to pick one of these, please double-check with me first:
- http://www.pinterest.com/ahahistorians/a-digital-tool-box-for-historians/pins/
- http://dirt.projectbamboo.org/

Optional sessions

Public history and crowdsourcing
The availability of computers and the internet has made it far easier for interested laymen and -women to learn about and produce historical knowledge. In this session we will explore platforms which offer new ways to the public to engage with and produce history. Why do people engage in crowdsourcing activities without pay and little recognition and what drives their interest in history in the first place? How can someone without formal training in history contribute to a history project? In this session we will discuss the emergence of public history and crowdsourcing and its strengths and weaknesses. Follow Leon's links to various crowdsourcing tools as well as those below and try to understand what they do and how they differ. How could they be of use for your work?

Required Readings
- Historypin, http://www.historypin.com/
- People's collection Wales, http://www.peoplescollectionwales.co.uk/
- Hurricane Archive, http://www.hurricanearchive.org/collections ,
- The September 11 Digital Archive, http://911digitalarchive.org/

- Sharon Leon, Why Crowdsourcing? Why Scripto?, http://www.6floors.org/bracket/2011/03/10/why-crowdsourcing-why-scripto/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:+bracket+%28[Bracket]%29
- Bruce Sterling, Order out of Chaos, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.04/view.html?pg=4
- Transcribe Bentham, http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/1009/10090802/, http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/transcribe-bentham/
- Old Weather, http://www.oldweather.org/
- The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, 1674-1913, http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/
- Zooniverse, https://www.zooniverse.org/project/ancientlives
- Monk - Search & annotation tools for handwritten manuscripts, http://application01.target.rug.nl/monk/demo.html