

Methods and Practice of Digital Public History: The Power of Petitions

Prof. Jacqueline Beatty

Course Description:

Historians are now living and working in a digital age, and as such, must confront and engage in the theory and practices of digital public history. Throughout this course, we will grapple with the challenges of doing digital public history. As this is a collective enterprise, much of our exploration and practice will be done together in class in order to implement strategies for best practice on our site. We will engage with new and innovative readings and projects relating to digital public history, but we will also explore traditional primary and secondary sources, especially as they relate to the topic of petitions in early America. By the end of the semester, we will have created a cohesive, digital archive of early Virginians' petitions to their state legislature.

Course Objectives:

1. To introduce students to the theory, methodology, and practice of digital public history.
2. To provide students with the necessary tools to create works of digital public history.
3. To reinforce traditional methods of doing history, and engage students in primary research and secondary source readings.
4. To demonstrate the importance of the use of digital technology for the practice of history.

Grading and Course Policies:

Classroom Etiquette: As this is a digital history course, students should bring laptops to class each week. We will be exploring tools and sites on a regular basis, so access to a computer is necessary. During class, students should only be engaging with class materials. Failure to comply with this policy will result in a reduced participation grade.

Communications: In an effort to engage a variety of digital methods as we study the past, students will participate in Twitter discussions using the hashtag #HIST300F17 and will also submit weekly blog posts along with responding to each other's posts. Continuing the discussion after class (via blog posts and Twitter) is strongly encouraged! Students should also communicate with the instructor via the university email system, and check their email regularly for course updates.

Participation and Attendance: Weekly attendance is mandatory. Participation will be graded based on student's discussions in class, on Twitter, and in comments on their peers' blog posts).

Online Presence: Students will create a Twitter account and a blog site through which they will discuss each week's readings along with their challenges and successes with the semester-long project in order to help each other through the process of doing digital history. Students must post their brief, 300-500 word reactions to each week's readings and assignments **24 hours in advance** of our class meeting time. Students must also respond to at least three of their peers' posts through commenting on their reactions before our class meeting.

Semester-Long Project: This course is meant to expose students to best practices and methods for studying the past through exposure to digital theory and tools. Students will work together to create an online repository of open-access, digital archive of petitions to the General Assembly of Virginia between 1776 and 1865. Using the PDF files available at the Library of Virginia's Digital Collection (<http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/petitions>), students will transcribe twenty-five petitions. For these sources, they will assign appropriate metadata tags to these sources. Additionally, students will research relevant topics in early American history to provide context for their sources to an online audience. Students will also partner with one other student to double-check transcriptions, metadata tags, and ask questions about any additional research that may need to be done to contextualize these sources. Over the course of the semester, students in this class will work together to create an open-access Omeka site (<https://omeka.org/>) through which they will collectively post hundreds of these petitions to an online audience. On the site, students' transcriptions will be juxtaposed with images of these sources, along with the historical context students have assembled in annotations, with appropriate citations.

Grade Distribution:

Attendance and Participation: 25%

Weekly Blog Posts: 20%

Discussion Leading: 10%

Final Project: 45%

Part I, Initial Transcriptions and Annotations: 10%

Part II, Peer Review: 5%

Part III, Final Transcriptions, Annotations, and Site Building: 20%

Part IV, Self-Evaluation: 5%

Course Schedule

Week 1: Course Introduction and Doing History

- Syllabus Overview
- Reading:
 - Cronon, “Getting Ready to Do History,” p 1-7, available at http://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Cronon_Carnegie_Essay_Getting_Ready_to_Do_History_2004.pdf
- In-Class Activity:
 - Sign up for WordPress site, Twitter account
 - Sign up for leading discussion with a partner by end of class

Week 2: Introduction to Digital History

- Reading:
 - Cohen and Rozenzweig, “Exploring the History Web” (entire chapter) available at <http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/exploring/>
 - Seefeldt and Thomas, “What Is Digital History?” available at <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2009/intersections-history-and-new-media/what-is-digital-history>
- In-Class Activity:
 - Overview of Final Project
 - Please explore the Memorable Days Project (<https://davisdiaries.villanova.edu/>) in advance of our class meeting to familiarize yourself with the kind of project we will be working on together this semester.
 - We will evaluate the Memorable Days Project together, and craft a working list of what makes a good and bad digital public history project for the purposes of our final project.

Week 3: Introduction to the History of Petitioning

- Reading:
 - Ruth Bogin, “Petitioning and the New Moral Economy of Post-Revolutionary America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 45, no. 3 (July 1988), 391-425.
 - Marcia Schmidt Blaine, “The Power of Petitions: Women and the New Hampshire Provincial Government, 1695-1770,” in Lex Heerma van Voss, ed., *Petitions in Social History* (New York: The University of Cambridge Press, 2002), 59-78.
- In-Class Activity:
 - Explore the Legislative Petitions Digital Collection at the Library of Virginia (<http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/petitions>) and begin to think about topics for your final project. By the end of class, **get your final project topic approved by the professor.**

Week 5: Creating a Web Presence and Beginning HTML

- Reading:

- Miriam Posner, “Creating Your Web Presence: A Primer for Academics,” available at <http://www.chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/creating-your-web-presence-a-primer-for-academics/30458>
- “What is HTML?”
 - <https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/Guide/HTML/Introduction>
- Beginning HTML in WordPress: <https://en.support.wordpress.com/beginning-html/>
- HTML Element Guide: <https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/HTML/Element>
- In-Class Activity:
 - Personalize your WordPress site with different widgets, HTML code, links to your twitter and professional social media sites. Keep in mind the suggestions from Posner’s “Creating Your Web Presence.”
 - We will also play with basic HTML coding language by using the TextEdit software on your computers.

Week 6: Using the Web to Do Research

- In-Class Activity:
 - Explore library databases for finding primary and secondary sources
 - Learn how to locate, evaluate, and understand secondary sources.
 - Begin secondary research on your topic.
 - Collect citations in Zotero (<https://www.zotero.org/>)

Week 7: Digital Public History and Site Design

- Reading
 - Trevor Owens, “Becoming Digital Public Historians,” available at <http://www.trevorowens.org/2015/05/becoming-digital-public-historians/>
 - Steven Krug, “How we *really* use the web,” available at <http://www.sensible.com/chapter.html>
 - “Responsive Web Design: What it is and how to use it,” available at <https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2011/01/guidelines-for-responsive-web-design/>
- In-Class Activity: We will collectively strategize what we want our final project site to look like. We will map our layout, basic HTML coding, and investigate what information we need to achieve our goals.

Week 8: Asking Questions and Building Projects

- Reading:
 - W. Caleb McDaniel, “How to Read for History,” available at <http://wcm1.web.rice.edu/howtoread.html>
 - W. Caleb McDaniel, “How to Discuss a Book for History,” available at <http://wcm1.web.rice.edu/howtodiscuss.html>
 - Sam Weinburg, “Thinking Like a Historian,” available at http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical_thinking/article.html
- In-Class Activity:

- Go to <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/>. Complete two student evaluations on the site.
- Once you have finished, post the results on your blog.
- **Due: Initial Transcriptions**
 - Students should hand in copies of their initial transcripts (labelled appropriately) and annotations both to the professor and to their classmates for peer review.

Week 9: Building an Omeka Site

- Reading:
 - Miriam Posner, “Up and Running with Omeka.net,” available at <http://programminghistorian.org/lessons/up-and-running-with-omeka>
 - Miriam Posner and Megan Brett, “Creating an Omeka Exhibit,” available at <http://programminghistorian.org/lessons/creating-an-omeka-exhibit>
 - Explore Omeka Documentation (links on right side panel): <http://info.omeka.net/>
 - “Working With Dublin Core,” available at http://omeka.org/codex/Working_with_Dublin_Core
- In-Class Activity
 - We will begin to build our final project site on Omeka by uploading PDF images of our transcripts and editing the metadata tags. Please bring a copy of your transcripts, as we will use these to determine what metadata tags to include on each source.

Week 10: Collecting and Designing History Online

- Reading:
 - Cohen and Rozenzweig, “Collecting History Online,” (entire chapter), available at <http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/collecting/>
 - Cohen and Rozenzweig, “Designing for the History Web” <http://chnm.gmu.edu/digitalhistory/designing/>
- In-Class Activity:
 - We will locate a variety of digital Public History sites, create a list of what works (based on the Cohen and Rozenzweig readings), what does not work, and what practices we should implement for our final project.

Week 11: Evaluating Digital Public History

- Reading:
 - “AHA Guidelines for Professional Evaluation of Digital Scholarship by Historians,” available at <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/digital-history-resources/evaluation-of-digital-scholarship-in-history/guidelines-for-the-professional-evaluation-of-digital-scholarship-by-historians>
 - “Evaluating Public History Websites,” available at <http://www.publchistory.org/evaluation/EvaluatingPublicHistoryWebSites-OLD.doc>
- In-Class Activity:
 - Explore two Digital Public History sites and evaluate them on your blog.
 - Post your evaluations by the end of class.
- **Due: Annotations for Initial Transcriptions**

- Students should hand in copies in to professor and to classmate for peer review.

Week 12: Audience and Accessibility in Digital Public History

- Reading:
 - Cohen and Rozenzweig, “Building an Audience,” (entire chapter) available at <http://wcm1.web.rice.edu/howtodiscuss.html>
 - Allen-Greil et al., “Social Media and Organizational Change,” available at http://www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw2011/papers/social_media_and_organizational_change
- In-Class Activity
 - Create a working list of best strategies for engaging the public in our final project.
 - Create a plan to implement these goals and make our project accessible to the public.
- **Due: Peer Review**
 - Notations on peer’s transcripts and annotations, questions, and suggestions for further research (handed in to both professor and classmate)

Week 13: Digital Tools

- In-Class Activity:
 - Play with the following tools during class.
 - DuraCloud: <http://www.duracloud.org/>
 - VoiceThread: <http://voicethread.com/>
 - Viewshare: <http://viewshare.org/>
 - Many Eyes: <http://www-958.ibm.com/software/analytics/labs/manyyeyes/>
 - Explore the “Best of the Web”: <http://www.museumsandtheweb.com/best-of-the-web/>
 - Post on your blog about which tools you think are most applicable for creating digital public history projects.

Week 14: NO CLASS

- Work on Final Project and presentations

Week 15: Final Project Presentations

- Students will present their transcriptions, annotations, and what they’ve learned about the practices of digital history over the course of the semester.
- **Due: Final Transcriptions and Annotations**
 - Built-in on Class Omeka site
- **Due: Self-Evaluations**
 - (via blog post)