

# Digital Archives and Digital Publics

**Instructor:** Jim McGrath

**Course Meeting Times:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30pm-3:50pm

**Location:** Seminar Room, Nightingale-Brown House, John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage (357 Benefit St.)

**Office Hours:** TBD

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## Official Course Description

This course considers the (perhaps surprisingly) long history of digital archives in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, surveying the various efforts of academic institutions, community organizers, activists, amateurs, and anarchists, examining digitized and “born-digital” materials, reflecting on relationships between ideas of cultural value and forms of materiality, technology, access, and dissemination. Particular attention will be paid to imagined audiences and uses of digital archives: scholarly, political, speculative, creative, memetic, and otherwise. This course provides students with opportunities to learn from archivists (and to visit local special collections on and off-campus) and to develop projects informed by best practices in digital public humanities.

## Learning Goals

Over the course of this semester, students will:

- learn archival theory and its applications to digital contexts and projects
- survey contemporary approaches to digital archives, innovative uses of digitized archival materials, and efforts by local archivists, librarians, and digital humanities scholars at Brown and in New England
- review exemplary models and experiment with uses of digital archival materials in the contexts of publication, data visualization, social media dissemination, podcasts, augmented reality, APIs, artificial intelligence, and other approaches to digital collections and digital storytelling
- demonstrate their understanding of the relationship between digital archive and audience through the creation and dissemination of a digital public humanities project

## Course Requirements

Over 15 weeks, students will spend three hours per week in class (45 hours total). Engagement with course readings and research related to digital tools and projects will take approximately 4 1/2 hours per week (68 hours total). Completion of major course assignments is estimated to take 67 hours total (spread across the semester). In total, time estimated to complete activities related to this class should take 180 hours to complete over the course of the semester (on average, 12 hours per week). These estimates are in line with time estimates for typical Brown University courses. Please be in touch ASAP if you have questions about course completion expectations.

We may leave the classroom on a few occasions to complete course-related field research or workshopping: in those instances, you will receive sufficient advance notice and we'll utilize our regular meeting time for these activities (in the event that you have other commitments before or after our course, we'll talk and figure that out). If there are events or programming that seem of interest to the course but fall outside our regular meeting times, I will let you know about them, but your attendance is not required.

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you have a disability or other conditions that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or [SEAS@brown.edu](mailto:SEAS@brown.edu). Students in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact one of the deans in the Dean of the College office.

**Reliable web access:** Given the nature of this course, it's essential that you be able to get on the web on a regular basis. Please see me if you have any questions about this requirement or if you'd like to talk about resources here at Brown.

**Classroom technology:** There will be days when we will require the use of laptops, tablets, and/or smartphones to view and complete course work. There may be particular days when a laptop is preferable to a tablet, given the need to work with a particular tool. I will let you know in advance should these needs arise if you require additional resources. You are not required to purchase or own laptops, tablets, and/or smart phones for this course, though you may find that bringing one or more of these devices to class is useful. Bringing a Wifi-enabled device you're comfortable reading and writing on in class is recommended but not required. Please see me if you have questions or concerns about technology resources available to you at Brown.

**Slack:** The class will use Slack to share links related to our themes and readings and to check in on progress on major assignments. Slack also offers a chat feature allowing users to privately message one another, a feature that should be used for course-related conversations. Slack is free and accessible via a web address or the Slack application. We'll discuss how we're using Slack this semester during our first class. Please contact me ASAP if you have questions or concerns about use of Slack or particular messages you've seen or received on Slack.

## Course Materials and Readings

Course reading are outlined in further detail in the semester calendar. Direct links to readings can be found on the course site. Readings will be taken from material that is accessible online or via physical / digital library resources; check email and Slack on a regular basis for materials, and be in touch if you can't find a particular text.

### Key Course Texts

*#HashtagActivism*. Sarah Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles. MIT Press, 2020.

*Algorithms of Oppression*. Safiya Umoja Noble. NYU Press, 2018.

*Bodies of Information: Intersectional Feminism and Digital Humanities*. Elizabeth Losh and Jacqueline Wernimont, eds. University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

*Code and Clay, Data and Dirt: Five Thousand Years of Urban Media*. Shannon Mattern. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

*Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era*. N. Katharine Hayles and Jessica Pressman, eds. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

*Debates in the Digital Humanities*. Eds. Matthew Gold and Lauren Klein. University of Minnesota Press. 2012-present.

*Digital History: A Guide to Gathering, Preserving, and Presenting the Past on the Web*. Roy Rosenzweig and Dan Cohen. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.

*History in The Age of Abundance*. Ian Milligan. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019.

*How Charts Lie: Getting Smarter about Visual Information*. Alberto Cairo. Norton, 2019.

*The Library Book*. Susan Orlean. Simon and Schuster. 2018.

*Mechanisms: New Media and The Forensic Imagination*. Matt Kirschenbaum. MIT Press, 2012.

*New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis, and Pedagogy*. Roopika Risam. Northwestern UP, 2019.

*The Politics of Mass Digitization*. Nanna Bonde Thylstrup. MIT Press, 2019.

*Reading Writing Interfaces: From The Digital to The Bookbound*. Lori Emerson, University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

*Remediation*. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. MIT Press, 1998.

*The Social Photo: On Photography and Social Media*. Nathan Jurgenson. Verso Books, 2019.

*The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation*. Trevor Owens. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018.

*Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun. MIT Press, 2016.

*W.E.B. DuBois' Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America*. Eds. Whitney Battle-Baptiste and Britt Rusert. Princeton Architectural Press, 2018.

## Course Policies

I expect that students will regularly attend class sessions, keep up with readings, and submit graded work on time. I also assume that students will participate in class discussions and be respectful of their peers in said discussions. Excessive absences or missing assignments / contributions to Slack can negatively impact your grade.

If you have concerns about your ability to meet particular course requirements or assignment due dates, please email me or talk to me after class.

## Major Assignments

**Presentation (15%):** Each student will lead a fifteen-minute class session on a topic related to our course objectives and readings. Topics and forms of presentations will be pitched to me in advance. You have a lot of flexibility in terms of your approach (lecture, case study, conversation, mini-workshop, performance, etc.) and you are free to collaborate on a presentation (in groups no larger than two).

**Class Discussion Prompt (5%):** Each student will be required to begin the discussion of a course reading once in the course of the semester. Students will provide 1-3 discussion

questions in advance (via Google Docs) and will briefly initiate our in-class conversation with these frameworks in mind.

**Class Workshop Projects (20%):** Over the course of the semester we'll complete four short collaborative exercises related to Digitization, Datafication, Digital Curation, and Speculative Archives. Additional details on each workshop will be provided.

**Blog Post / Public Writing (20%):** Each student will complete a short piece of writing related to course content (multimodal work or short podcasts also accepted) that will circulate in some public form: via the course site, the JNBC blog, *History@Work* (the blog of the National Council on Public History), or elsewhere online.

**Final Project (40%):** By the end of the semester, each student will publish and disseminate a project that makes use of digitized archival materials. "Use" is broadly defined here and use-cases will draw on the range of examples provided in class: forms of digital curation, remediation (datafication and/or visualization, physical / augmented reality exhibits, etc.), digital storytelling, creative and speculative endeavors. I will provide information on resources that allow for curatorial / transformative uses of collections materials. Students will be required to submit a proposal document (15% of grade) that outlines the aims and audiences relevant to the project, as well as a breakdown of project tasks, copyright / use-case contexts, and forms of publication and dissemination. Final Projects can be collaborative, pending approval. Projects may also build on previous coursework completed in presentation, workshop, or writing work, provided the proposal document details the plans to expand upon this initial work.

## Schedule

TH 1/23 First Day: Ideas of Archives and Digitization

T 1/28 Archives, Digitization, and Digital Publics: Course Contexts

*Readings for Today:* [“What do you mean by Archive? Genres of Usage for Digital Preservers”](#) (Trevor Owens; *Library of Congress*); “Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation” (Michelle Caswell; *The Public Historian*); “The Transnational and The Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and The Shadows They Cast” (Lara Putnam; *American Historical Review*)

TH 1/30 Archival Technologies: Trip to The John Hay Library

*Readings for Today:* Excerpts from *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* (Susan Howe); [Special Collections of the Brown University Library: A History and Guide](#)

T 2/4 Archives and Digital Archives: Key Concepts

*Readings for Today:* Excerpts from *New Digital Worlds* (Roopika Risam); Excerpts from *Code and Clay* (Shannon Mattern); Excerpts from *Mechanisms* (Matthew Kirschenbaum)

TH 2/6 Digital Archives: Early Examples

*Readings for Today:* [The Walt Whitman Archive](#); [The September 11 Digital Archive](#); [Mukurtu](#); among other digital projects

T 2/11 Digitization: Key Concepts

*Readings for Today:* Excerpts from *The Politics of Mass Digitization* (Nanna Bonde Thylstrup); Excerpts from *Algorithms of Oppression* (Safiya Umoja Noble); Excerpts from *Remediation* (Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin)

TH 2/13 Digitization Work-In-Progress (Conversation with Providence Public Library and Rhode Island State Archives)

*Readings for Today:* [“Why Do We Digitize? The Case for Slow Digitization”](#) (Andrew Prescott and Lorna Hughes; *Archive Journal*)

T 2/18 NO CLASS: LONG WEEKEND

TH 2/20 “Born-Digital” Materials, Archives, and Publics

*Readings for Today:* Excerpts from *Digital History* (Roy Rosenzweig and Dan Cohen); “Does Information Really Want to Be Free? Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Question of

Openness.” (Kimberly Christen; *International Journal of Communication*); “Publics and Counter-Publics” (Michael Warner; *Publics and Counter-Publics*)

T 2/25 Data and Archives: Key Concepts

*Readings for Today:* “[Markup Bodies: Black \[Life\] Studies and Slavery \[Death\] Studies at the Digital Crossroads](#)” (Jessica Marie Johnson, *Social Text*); “[Turning The Inside Out](#)” (Tim Sherratt)

TH 2/27 Datafication Workshop

T 3/3 Digital Publics: Key Concepts

*Readings for Today:* Excerpts from *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Eds. Matthew Gold and Lauren Klein); Excerpts from *The Library Book* (Susan Orlean); Excerpts from *The Social Photo* (Nathan Jurgenson)

TH 3/5 Digital Publics and Design / Interfaces

*Readings for Today:* Excerpts from *Reading Writing Interfaces* (Lori Emerson)

T 3/10 Digital Archives and Digital Public Humanities: Key Concepts

*Readings for Today:* Excerpts from *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation* (Trevor Owens); Excerpts from *Updating To Remain The Same* (Wendy Chun)

TH 3/12 Digital Commonwealth and Metadata (Guest Speaker: Tom Blake, Boston Public Library)

T 3/17 History After Digital Archives

*Readings for Today:* Excerpts from *History in the Age of Abundance* (Ian Milligan); “[everywhere, every when](#)” (Bethany Nowviskie); Excerpts from *Comparative Textual Media* (Various)

TH 3/19 Personal Archiving Workshop

*Readings for Today:* “[All My Blogs Are Dead](#)” (Carter Maness; *The Awl*); Internet Archive Wayback Machine

T 3/24 NO CLASS: SPRING RECESS

TH 3/26 NO CLASS: SPRING RECESS

T 3/31 Collections As Data: Tools and Possibilities

*Readings for Today:* Excerpts from [Collections As Data](#); Excerpts from *Bodies as Information* (Jacqueline Weinmont); Excerpts from *How Charts Lie* (Alberto Cairo)

TH 4/2 Visualization Lecture (Guest Speaker: Patrick Rashleigh, Center for Digital Scholarship)

T 4/7 Digital Archival Possibilities: Aggregators, APIs, and Machine Learning

*Readings for Today:* Excerpts from *W.E.B. Dubois' Data Portraits* (Ed. Whitney Battle-Baptiste); Excerpts from *Data Feminisms* (Lauren Klein)

TH 4/9 Digital Curation Workshop

T 4/14 Digital Object Lessons (Digital Project Development)

*Work for Today:* Digital Project Draft Assignment

TH 4/16 Grants, Labor, and Digital Publics

*Readings for Today:* "Precarious Labor and Digital Humanities" (McGrath et al); NEH Office of Digital Humanities Grant Proposal Guidelines

T 4/21 Speculative Archives

*Readings for Today:* Speculative

TH 4/23 Speculative Archives Workshop

T 4/28 Speculative Media Lecture (Elika Ortega; University of Colorado)

TH 4/30 Living In Public, Living As Archival Subjects

*Readings for Today:* *We Live In Public* (Dir. Ondi Timoner); Excerpts from *#HashtagActivism* (Sarah Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles)

T 5/5 Last Day of Classes / Discussion of Final Projects