

History 235: Bringing the English Past to Virtual Life

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This course explores the history of England, starting with a brief look at the time of the Tudors and then moving rapidly into the early years of the Industrial Revolution. Our focus will be on the history of poverty and social welfare in the eighteenth century, and throughout the course, we will use new technologies to develop innovative ways to teach and learn about the past. Using a specially designed digital archive, students will construct life stories of paupers, and have a chance to think of the disparate perspectives of various politicians and intellectuals. At least one day per week, students will be in a computer lab, building or working with 3-Dimensional, virtual institutions and designing computer game scenarios that utilize their research to recreate the lived experience of the poor. Much teamwork has already gone into creating the resources that you will use this term, and we need to thank Graham Earley, Jeremy Fisher and Alex Wachino for their work. **Florence Wong**, who has been a research assistant and digital humanities associate for over a year, will also serve as the **course teaching assistant**.

The course is basically divided into two sections. For the first five weeks, we will:

- develop some basic knowledge of English history
- explore key digital tools (WordPress, TimelineJS, Omeka, Twine, Unity)
- engage disparate theoretical stances regarding institutions

Our course project for these five weeks will be to work together to build digital resources for one particular historical site: the Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum in Norfolk, England. The curator of Gressenhall will be joining us for the fifth week of term, and our goal for this part of the course is to develop digital resources that are helpful to her in launching the museum's new "Voices of the Workhouse" displays. Thus we are participating directly in a significant public history project in the UK.

For the second five weeks, the course focuses on:

- developing a deeper understanding of the nuances of the material culture and social history of England
- utilizing digital tools to build new virtual environments in order to "play the past" in innovative ways (all of the tools listed above, plus SketchUp)
- engaging in deeper discussion of theoretical and historiographical debates on the nature of institutions, with each student developing an individual stance on the most meaningful way to conceptualize the history of places like the workhouse

Students will develop individual or small group projects to be completed in the last two weeks of term. These may include modelling a variety of institutions using SketchUp or objects using Blender; continuing to develop digital tools related to the Gressenhall projects; more advanced digital story-telling and game design.

Throughout the term, students will be developing their skills as writers, enhancing their critical thinking skills, and applying these skills in creative projects that necessitate an empathetic engagement with the past.

Course Expectations:

- Class attendance is mandatory; you should arrive in class on time and ready to participate fully in the day's discussion, having completed all assigned readings or other work for the day.
- Adopting a positive, flexible outlook will be essential. This is a very experimental course, and we are all (professors included!) learners here. It will be critical to the success of the course that we each give generously of our disparate skills and knowledge.
- Assignments must be turned in at the assigned due date. Any unexcused late work will be graded down one letter grade per day. Students needing extensions for reasons of job interviews, illness or other serious cause should seek permission from **both** professors as far in advance as possible.

Expectations for Digital Assignments

- This course assumes no prior knowledge of any specific digital tools, but a willingness to try new things and experiment outside your comfort zone is vital. Many of our class periods will involve hands-on tutorial sessions, but you will be expected to continue to experiment and build your skills outside of the classroom.

Grades: The following formal assessment of your work will determine your grade for the course.

- Attendance and participation in class discussions: 20%
- Blog Posts: 15%
- Written assignments:
 - Transcription exercise – 5%
 - Hitchcock and Shoemaker analysis -10%
 - Pauper Biography (parts one and two) – 5%
 - Analytical essay on institutions – 10%
- Gressenhall Projects: 15%
- Final Projects: 20%

Expectations for Class Discussion:

Students are expected to complete the assigned readings by the class period under which they are listed. We will be discussing these readings together as a group, and our collective goal is to help each member of the class reach the greatest possible understanding of the readings. You should come to class prepared to listen closely to the ideas of your classmates, and to contribute your own thoughts. Effective class discussion means not simply speaking frequently, but contributing in an active and generous way to the work of the class as a whole, by asking questions, offering

interpretations, politely challenging your colleagues, and graciously accepting challenges in return. Remember that active listening is a very important way of participating, and you should strive to avoid monopolizing the conversation in the classroom. It will be very disruptive to have students trickling in after class has started. For this reason, we ask that you all be on time for class, and that if you are going to be more than 10 minutes late for the start of the class, that you simply take an absence for that day and accept that your grade will be marked down accordingly if such absences continue.

“A” participation grades will be earned by excellent attendance (no unexcused absence) and lively participation in almost all classroom discussions

“B” grades are given for excellent attendance (no more than one unexcused absence) and participation in most discussions in class; this participation may very well include attentive listening and general engagement, as well as verbal disputation.

“C” grades are achieved by fair attendance (no more than two unexcused absences) at the majority of discussions and participation in at least half of the classes

D-F - inadequate attendance (missing more than three classes) and failure to participate in classes