

HIST 222 *Data* – short version for web

Fall 2023

Gen Ed (HS), 4 credits

Instructor

Professor Siddique

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Course Outline

What is data? How has it been created, used, and stored in human history? What forms have humans invented in order to circulate and share it with others? And what values have societies invested in data? Challenging the idea that data is value neutral and historically static, this course will explore these questions through a history of the politics of information and its technological manifestations in societies mainly, but not exclusively located in the landmass that came to be called Europe and in the north Atlantic world. A recurring theme in the course will be the relationship between the claims that people make to political power; and the accounts that they give of how information should be created, circulated, interpreted, and controlled. How has this relationship changed over time, and how has it been inflected by changes in the nature of politics and new technological developments?

Students will read both complex primary sources and key historiographical interventions, practicing the skills of interpreting evidence in both oral and written contexts in both class discussions and through short analytical papers. Other assignments will include a midterm exam, a final exam, and evaluation of active participation during discussion meetings.

Course Objectives

“Data” is a 200 level designation History course within the General Education curriculum that fits the HS (Historical Studies) designation.

As a 200 level course, “Data” involves the study of a historical subject in depth across a broad chronological tapestry, allowing students to gain knowledge of a less familiar historical subject than would be introduced at a 100 level. It helps students develop their knowledge of historical methods through essay writing that will require them to make interpretive arguments about complex evidence through recognizing and interpreting diverse source materials. They will learn how to place these arguments in the context of both historiographical debates and the analysis of contemporary events. Through the reading, lectures, discussions, and research paper assignment, students will learn how to make historical arguments about a diverse set of source material, evaluate historiography, and develop an awareness of history as a contested field of knowledge and interpretation.

General Education courses at UMass provide a specific kind of course content: a breadth of experience in a subject or topic fundamental to the workings of our rapidly-changing world that prepare participants to act thoughtfully and responsibly in society by acquiring both the knowledge and the skills to act as informed citizens of the wider world. Digital data defines the lives of modern students – they produce and consume it constantly as they engage in computing, texting, listening to

music, watching videos, and engaging in other activities on gadgets such as computers, smartphones, and tablets. These practices of data production and use are bound up with relationships of power that emerged out of historically specific structural and institutional contexts; but students rarely have the opportunity to critically reflect upon what those contexts are and the political, ethical, and social implications of our current data regime. It is therefore imperative that students have the opportunity to think historically and critically about the media practices in which they are almost constantly engaged during their waking hours.

Assignments and Grading

There are two grading ‘tracks’; you can decide which you prefer. You do not have to let us know; simply either take the final if you want your final grade to be determined by ‘Track A’ or do not take the final if you want your grade to be determined by ‘Track B’

Track ‘A’

Essay #1, 10% (due Monday, October 9, 11:59pm EST)
 Midterm Exam, 15% (Wednesday, October 25, in class, closed book/closed notes)
 Essay #2, 15% (due Friday, November 17, 11:59pm EST)
 Essay #3, 20% (due Friday, December 8, 11:59pm EST)
 Final Exam, 20% (to be scheduled by the Registrar; in class, closed book/closed notes)
 Participation / Attendance, 20%

Track ‘B’

Essay #1, 15% (due Monday, October 9, 11:59pm EST)
 Midterm Exam, 15% (Wednesday, October 25, in class, closed book/closed notes)
 Essay #2, 20% (due Friday, November 17, 11:59pm EST)
 Essay #3, 25% (due Friday, December 8, 11:59pm EST)
 Participation / Attendance, 25%

Here is a description of each of these assessments:

Midterm Exam, October 25: This in-class, closed-book exam will cover all the material (both lectures and assigned readings) through the October 23 class. It will consist of identifications of key terms and concepts.

Essays: Students in this course will write three essays. All of these assignments must be submitted on time by their designated due dates; late submissions will receive grade deductions; and unless you have a valid personal or medical emergency, no extensions will be given. The assignment descriptions are posted on Moodle.

Final Exam: This **optional** in-class, closed-book exam on a date to be determined by the Registrar’s Office will cover all the material in the course. This cumulative exam will consist of identifications of key terms and concepts; and an essay (chosen from several prompts) that will require you to demonstrate your synthetic knowledge of the course. **If you take the final exam, you will be graded in terms of Track A. If you do not take the final exam, you will be graded in terms of Track B. Sorry – no bespoke option. You do not need to tell us whether you want to be graded in terms of Track A or Track B, nor do you need to decide at any particular time; simply show up and take the final at the scheduled time, or don’t.**

Participation in Discussion Meeting: Active participation and regular attendance to the discussion meetings is required. Participation requires being prepared for each meeting by completing the reading in full in advance, bringing your interpretations and perspectives to the meeting and voicing them respectfully, listening attentively to others and giving constructive feedback, and engaging in respectful debate that is driven by argument and evidence rather than hyperbole and speculation. Unless there are extenuating circumstances discussed promptly with the professor, absence from any required section will have a detrimental impact on your participation grade and may result in failure in the course.

All work will be graded in accordance with the standard UMass letter grading scale, and with the UMass History Department's standard grading criteria for assignments, as listed on the UMass website at these URLs:

<https://www.umass.edu/registrar/sites/default/files/Grading%20System.pdf>

Individual grades will be based on the scale shown below:

A 93-100%

A-90-92%

B+ 87-89%

B 83-86%

B-80-82%

C+ 77-79%

C 73-76%

C-70-72%

D 60-69%

F 59% and below

Assignments will be given a letter grade, which will then be weighted as above in the calculation of the final course grade.

Required Materials

The vast majority of reading will be provided at no cost to students as files on Moodle or as links on the internet. There is only one book that should be bought (or, alternatively, you can read the free version posted on Moodle). Every effort has therefore been made to minimize the cost of textbooks for students.

I suggest printing out the readings and doing them in hard copy. Whether or not you do this, you should take notes as you read. What's the author or document stating? What values / beliefs / assumptions are they projecting or making, even unconsciously?

Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (2019)

Attendance Policies

Students need to attend all class meetings. Attendance will be taken at regular intervals, and unexcused absences will result in a lowered participation grade.

Disability Accommodations

The University of Massachusetts-Amherst is committed to making reasonable, effective and appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of students with disabilities and help create a barrier-free campus. If you have a disability and require accommodations, please register with Disability Services (161 Whitmore Administration Building; (413) 545-0892; ostiguy@admin.umass.edu) to have an accommodation letter sent to me. Information on services and materials for registering are also available on their website at www.umass.edu/disability.

If you do have a documented learning disability and have registered with Disability Services, please ask them to contact me, and speak with me so that we can ensure that you have the necessary accommodations to perform in this course. If you have a learning disability and have not registered with Disability Services, please do so as soon as possible, and feel free to speak to me if you need help getting in touch with them. I am committed to ensuring that you are accommodated, but I cannot unless you are officially registered with the University.

Academic Honesty

Please review the University's policies on academic honesty, which apply in full with respect to all written and oral work in this course, available at this website: <https://www.umass.edu/honesty/>; and please note that all University policies with respect to the conduct of academic affairs apply in this course, including the following two:

1. Academic Honesty Statement, Academic Regulations 2006-2007, pp. 7-8 (approved by the Faculty Senate on April 27, 2006), and available here: <http://www.umass.edu/registrar/media/academicregs.pdf>

“Intellectual honesty requires that students demonstrate their own learning during examinations and other academic exercises, and that other sources of information or knowledge be appropriately credited. Scholarship depends upon the reliability of information and reference in the work of others. Student work at the University may be analyzed for originality of content. Such analysis may be done electronically or by other means. Student work may also be included in a database for the purpose of checking for possible plagiarized content in future student submissions. No form of cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or facilitating dishonesty will be condoned in the University community.”

2. Code of Student Conduct, effective July, 1, 2019, and available here - https://www.umass.edu/dean_students/sites/default/files/documents/07.01.2019%20Code%20of%20Student%20Conduct.pdf, including the “Guidelines for Classroom Civility and Respect,” available here - https://www.umass.edu/dean_students/campus-policies/classroom

In relation to this, please note especially that: “Students should be aware that suspect assignments (e.g., those without drafts, works cited pages, or papers which make large departures in style) will be submitted to Turnitin and/or My Drop Box by the instructor for the purpose of detecting possible plagiarism. Submitted assignments will be included in the UMass Amherst dedicated databases of assignments at Turnitin and/or My Drop Box. These databases of assignments will be used solely for the purpose of detecting possible plagiarism during the grading process and during this term and in the future. Students must provide an electronic copy of their assignment to the instructor for submission to one or both of the services when plagiarism is suspected, in order to receive a grade on the assignment and to avoid possible sanctions.”

Policy on Generative AI

For the purposes of this class, you might find tools like Grammarly or a citation generator to be helpful, but I **strongly** discourage using generative AI (like ChatGPT or Bard) *except where explicitly allowed (see final assignment)*. I expect that your submissions will be your own work and while it is possible to use gAI in this fashion, it is more likely to lead you astray than it is to help you do your best work because gAI uses a predictive algorithm to produce text that sounds realistic without any actual intent or purpose.

I am not going to outright ban any tool, but **if you use any generative AI or any other tool to create material that you then submit as part of an assignment, you must cite the source just as you would any other statement that was not the product of your own thinking (i.e. with a footnote explaining that the content in the sentence is not your own thinking but comes from such and such source).**

Furthermore, please be aware of that **simply because content was generated by a generative AI tool does not mean that said content is accurate.** The statement could be factually incorrect or an incorrect interpretation. The result would be grade deductions just as if you had generated the incorrect content through your own thinking or from another source.

If you have questions about what “counts” as a plagiarism or academic dishonesty in this realm, please consult with me.

Syllabus

Wednesday, September 6:

Course Introduction: What is Data? Why is it a Recent Concept?

Reading:

Josh Dzieza, “AI is a Lot of Work,” *New York Magazine*, June 20, 2023

Friday, September 8: Discussion section meetings

Unit I. Information in the Ancient World: Texts, Institutions, Ideas

We begin the course with a unit on varieties of information and practices of collecting it in the ancient world. How did ancient writers and institutions collect it? How did they use it to establish authority? What meanings did they invest in it? Students will be introduced to the theme of the intertwined relationship between claims to political power and claims to control the circulation and meaning of information.

Monday, September 11:

Pliny and Herodotus Describe The World

Reading:

Herodotus, *Histories*, book 2, 2.1-2.31

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, book 7

Wednesday, September 13:
The Ancient Library

Reading:

Plato, *Phaedrus*, on the invention of writing

Roger Bagnall, "Alexandria: The Library of Dreams," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 146 (2002), 348-362

Friday, September 15: Discussion section meetings

Unit II: Circulating Information in Medieval Europe

How did the rise of Christianity alter the meaning of information in the Western hemisphere? In the next series of classes, we will focus on how the iconographical meaning of both the Fall of Adam and Eve and the figure of Jesus Christ in relation to ideas of knowledge and ways these ideas inflected practices and ideas of collecting in the post-Classical period. We will also look at the rise of the medieval university as a site for the production of knowledge.

Monday, September 18:
Fall and Resurrection

Reading:

Hebrew Bible, Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-3; Book of Numbers, Chapters 1-4

Wednesday, September 20:
Christian Knowledge: The Rise of the University

Reading:

Statutes of Gregory IX for the University of Paris, 1231

Lictere Generales, 1224

University of Paris: Courses in Theology and Medicine

University of Paris: Condemnation of Errors, 1241

Foundation of the University of Heidelberg, 1386

Friday, September 22: Discussion section meetings

Unit III: Curiosity, Collecting, and Power in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe

From roughly the fourteenth century onward, Europeans began to invent new modes of collecting and storing information – processes that were inseparable from their growing connectedness through trade, conquest, and war with other parts of the world, especially the Americas and South Asia; and from the fall of classical accounts of geography in the light of new 'empirical' experience. What were these modes, and how did information come to be organized within them? What ways of interpreting information came to be replaced by these 'empirical' sciences? We will be looking especially at the rise of 'curiosity' as a concept in intellectual and political discourse; the invention of the 'museum' as a site for organizing information; and the inseparability of Renaissance and early modern modes of gathering and organizing information from the construction of imperial power.

Monday, September 25:
The Invention of Curiosity and the Fall of Classical Geography

Reading:
Amerigo Vespucci, "Account of His First Voyage," 1497

Wednesday, September 27:
Collecting Curiosity: Cabinets and Museums

Reading:
Elias Ashmole, selected letters and writings

Friday, September 29: Discussion section meetings

Monday, October 2:
Empire and Information (I)

Reading:
Columbus' Report on His First Journey, 1493

Essay #1 Assignment due Monday, October 9 by 11:59pm EST on Moodle – see the description on Moodle.

Wednesday, October 4:
Empire and Information (II)

Reading:
Juan Gines de Sepulveda, *Democrates Alter*
Bartolomé De Las Casas, *Thirty Very Juridical Propositions*
De Las Casas, *Apologetic History of the Indies*

Friday, October 6: Discussion section meetings

Unit IV: Paper, Print, and the Problem of Information in Early Modern Europe

How did the rise of the printing press in the mid-15th century and the consequent proliferation of reading material in Europe impact ideas of information, its use, and its management? Over the next several classes, we will examine the significant intellectual and practical consequences of (1) the printing revolution; (2) the expansion of paper as a medium for conveying written information; (3) and the way the mass circulation and interpretation of written information became a subject of discussion for political thought. Would the proliferation of information circulated through print provoke political instability? What intellectual and political consequences resulted from the way that people in early modern Europe answered that question?

Monday, October 9:
Printing

Reading:

Read the following sections of the “History of the Book” website: Intro, both “Preliminaries,” and the first eight chapters (everything up to “Industrialization of Print”)

Essay #1 due via Moodle as a Microsoft Word attachment by 11:59pm EST

Wednesday, October 11:

Managing

Reading:

Sir Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (1620)

Sir Francis Bacon, “Of Travel” (1625)

Friday, October 13: Section Meetings

Monday, October 16:

Interpreting (I)

Reading:

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), Part I, Chapter VII (“Of the Ends or Resolutions of Discourse”)

Wednesday, October 18:

Interpreting (II)

Reading:

John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), Book II, Chapter I (“Of Ideas in General, and Their Original”)

Friday, October 20: Section Meetings

Monday, October 23:

Optional Midterm Review

Wednesday, October 25:

Midterm Exam (in class, closed book, closed notes)

Friday, October 27: No Section Meetings

Unit V: Publicity and the Problem of Political Power in the 1700s

During the eighteenth century, people in western Europe and its imperial outposts began to articulate new ideas of the relationship between information and politics – especially the idea that information should be publicly available because it would be a useful tool to hold rulers accountable. We will explore how changing ideas of the relationship between rulers and ruled also gave birth to new ideas of what information was, how it ought to be collected, and who ought to control it.

Monday, October 30:

Circulating Information in Imperial Europe: The Atlantic World

Reading:

Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, parts 1-7

Wednesday, November 1:

Circulating Information in Imperial Europe: The Indian Ocean World

Reading:

Excerpts from the East India Company Records (provided by instructor)

Friday, November 3: Section Meetings

Monday, November 6:

The American Revolution and the Problem of Information

Reading:

Explore the “News in the Age of Revolution” section of the American Antiquarian Society. Please look at both the main page and the three sections (“Prelude to Revolution”; “The Battles of Lexington and Concord: A Public Relations Case Study”; and “Spreading News of the War”)

Wednesday, November 8:

Enlightenment and Revolution

Reading:

Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795)

Friday, November 10: Section Meetings

Unit VI: How Data Happened

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, “data” was invented. What does this claim mean? How was “data” different from the history of “information” that we’ve been tracing thus far in the course?

Monday, November 13:

“Social Physics”

Reading:

Adolphe Quetelet, *A Treatise on Man* (1842), preface and introductory

Wednesday, November 15:

The Managerial Revolution in Data

Reading:

C. A. Burt (ed.), *Business Correspondence: The Underlying Factors of the Art* (1905), chapters 7, 8, 15-19

Friday, November 17: Section meetings

Essay #2 due via Moodle as a Microsoft Word attachment by 11:59pm EST

Monday, November 20:
Inventing the Average Person

Reading:

Lynds, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (1929), foreword, preface, chapter 1, 505-510, and skim the tables
George Gallup, "Polls of Public Opinion and What They Show," 1939

Unit VII: The Ideological Origins of "Big Data"

As this course has shown, neither data nor algorithmic means of organizing or controlling its use, meaning, and circulation are new. So how do we account for the seeming proliferation of large scale data collection and analysis – what is often called "big data" – as the defining feature of late capitalist life? Where did our current data regime actually come from? And can we change this regime? The course will conclude with a unit in which we examine this question, bringing our historical genealogy of ideas and practices of data up to the present day.

Monday, November 27:
Can Machines Think? The History of an Idea

Reading:

Alan Turing, "Computing machinery and intelligence," *Mind*, 59 (1950)
"A proposal for the Dartmouth summer research project on artificial intelligence" (1955)

Wednesday, November 29
Corporate Data, 2.0

Reading:

H. P. Luhn, "A Business Intelligence System," *IBM Journal* (1958)
David Court, "Getting Big Impact for Big Data," *McKinsey Quarterly*, January 2015

Friday, December 1: Section Meetings

Monday, December 4:
Government Data, 2.0

Reading:

Electronic Frontier Foundation, "AT&T's Role in Dragnet Surveillance of Millions of Its Customers," 2006
Glenn Greenwald, "No Place to Hide Documents" (skim – what interests you here?)

Wednesday, December 6:
Data Resistance

Reading:

Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (2019). I suggest reading the whole thing at some point (not difficult), but for present purposes, read at least chapters 1 and 2.

Friday, December 8: Section Meetings

Essay #3 due via Moodle as a Microsoft Word attachment by 11:59pm EST

For those who wish to take the final exam: this will be scheduled at the Registrar's discretion.