

Syllabus

MSL 2500H Constructing and Curating Digital Heritage

Tuesdays, 1 pm – 4 pm, Bissell 728

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Course Description

The impact of digital technology is increasingly visible in almost all fields of contemporary museum and cultural heritage practice. Digitization of cultural heritage collections, both within and outside museums, as well as the emergence of “born digital” cultural information on the Web, establish digital heritage as a new field of theory and practice, laden with new problems and opportunities, and introducing new issues and agendas related to the digital curation of cultural information. To elucidate these phenomena, this course introduces museum documentation and digital collection theory and practice through a historical examination of museum collections, cataloguing practices, as well as wider traditions on constructing and managing cultural information; it explores how information technologies change the role of museums and cultural heritage institutions as sites for curatorship, as infrastructures for scholarly research, and as memory institutions – guardians of authenticity and intellectual preservation of the past; finally, it examines critically how interactivity and narrative, virtual and augmented reality, social media, user-generated content, linked data and ontologies produce new challenges and opportunities for cultural memory, digital curation and meaning-making.

Students taking this course will be expected to develop a critical understanding of the concepts, issues and methodological approaches relevant to the construction and curation of digital cultural heritage collections, based on a combination of theoretical and applied work.

Learning objectives

This course aims to help you:

1. Develop essential knowledge and skills for involvement in work and/or research related to the conceptualization, development, curation or management of digital resources and information systems in the field of museums and heritage
2. Know the purpose, scope, considerations, methods and systems intended for organizing digital heritage collections (made of digitized or born-digital materials related to the cultural, natural and scientific heritage)
3. Develop a critical view of theoretical and critical aspects related to the conceptualization, development and use of digital heritage collections and systems

It course is based on developing both practical engagement and ability for critical judgment, and thus equip those wishing to work in a variety of information and digital technology-related functions in museums, heritage organizations, and digital infrastructure initiatives in the field of material, intangible and born-digital heritage.

Student outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students will have awareness and applied understanding of:

- Important aspects of the theory and history of the digital heritage field,
- Key methods of digital collection and digital asset creation, curation and management in the networked environment,
- Critical issues and perspectives related to the digital curation of heritage collections.

In addition, students will also be better able to:

- Establish and apply selection criteria for a digital collection of cultural heritage materials,
- Conceptualize and model information in the heritage domain,
- Specify and prototype a digital heritage collection.

Contribution to program learning outcomes

The course aims to contribute to the following program learning outcomes:

- *Building awareness and applied understanding of the history of museums*, as regards the “information turn” in museum practice, and the use of digital technologies for the documentation and management of collections.
- *Building awareness and applied understanding of professional responsibilities* related to the proper application of principles of information management in museum and heritage work.
- *Building awareness of museological best practices* as regards the conceptualization, design and curation of digital cultural heritage collections.

- *Building ability to innovate in the face of new challenges*, through critical assessment of issues and questions related to the emerging digital curation environment in which contemporary museums and heritage institutions operate.

Evaluation

The course will be assessed on the basis of three assignments as well as participation, as follows:

Assignment	Due	Weight
A1 Selection policy for a cultural heritage digital collection. 1,000 words. Individual assignment	Jan. 31	10%
A2 Digital collection conceptual model and prototype. Group assignment	March 7	40%
A3 Research paper. 2,500-3,000 words. Individual assignment	Apr. 11	40%
A4 Course participation, in class and online		10%

A1. Selection policy

This is an individual assignment. It should outline the rationale and selection criteria proposed for the creation of a digital collection in the field of cultural heritage, drawing from either an established physical collection (based in a museum, an archive, a cultural heritage institution, a research initiative, etc.) or from material to be found “in the wild” (e.g., online, from a community, on the basis of an issue or topic of interest, or through a process of crowdsourcing). The proposed collection could be real or speculative, but even so it should be situated in a concrete context (i.e., a specific museum, collection, community, or issue).

The assignment must be submitted via Blackboard, and should be in the form of a .doc, .docx or .pdf file. It should provide information on the scope of the proposed digital collection (what it will and what it will not contain), the rationale for its inception based on a clear statement of where its value and significance lies, and the criteria to be employed for the selection of specific items to be included in the collection. This is a brief professional report, and therefore it should neither contain scholarly references nor be written in the form of an essay: it should be succinct, scannable and clear, and should provide information needed for approval by an institution director or a funding organization.

The assignment will be assessed on the basis of the appropriateness of your concept for a digital collection, its value and significance, the specificity of the selection criteria suggested, the thoughtful utilization of course knowledge and competencies, the clarity and detail of the information provided, and the quality of written presentation.

A2. Conceptual model and prototype

This is a group assignment. You will be divided in groups of 2-3 students, and will work towards: a) identifying one specific cultural heritage topic, domain, class of objects, or field of activity, b) specifying a formal conceptual model suitable for the representation of the domain selected, and c) prototyping a digital collection in the form of a small subset of information objects represented using the model, as well as a description of a typical use of the digital collection. To construct the conceptual model, you may use any of the modeling approaches introduced in class. You may develop the model using pen and paper, or a software tool, as you see fit.

Each group should submit a single copy of the assignment on Blackboard, consisting of three parts: a) the conceptual model, represented as one or more diagrams, and documented in text as appropriate, to provide clear information on all proposed entity types, properties and relationships; b) the digital collection prototype, which may be either functional (i.e., implemented by software) or non-functional (i.e., just illustrated by a textual or visual information), and which should illustrate by example how information in your selected domain will be represented and accessed in the digital collection using your conceptual model; and, c) a documentation note of no more than 500 words, providing information on the approach you chose, and how it addresses the typical needs of users to access your digital collection. The title of your selected project and the names of all group members who contributed to it should be clearly identified in all components of the assignment.

The assignment will be evaluated on the basis of the correctness and appropriateness of the proposed model for the domain you chose, the proper use of an established conceptual modeling methodology or approach, and the ability of the digital collection prototype to convey a sense of how it will represent and allow access to information in your selected domain.

A3. Research paper

The research paper is an individual assignment, to be submitted as a text document (in .doc, .docx or .pdf format) of approx. 2,500-3,000 words, excluding references and footnotes, via Blackboard. You may use, as a starting point, specific instances of digital information systems or applications in a museum or cultural heritage context, either contemporary or historical, or a particular technology, setting, functionality, purpose, context, concept, critical issue, problem or implication related to the use of digital technology in cultural heritage information management, or to the concerns and challenges of digital curation. You may select a single but important concept, issue or question, a case study, two contrasting cases, or a representative set of examples of practice, as you see fit. The topic of your essay, illustrated by a preliminary title and a short outline or abstract, will be subject to approval by the instructor.

Standard rules of academic writing (with regard to avoidance of plagiarism, writing style, citation, consistent and appropriate formatting, and essay structure) apply. Your document should be double spaced text, using a 12" Times Roman font, numbered pages, a first page with your full name and student number, the title of your essay, the name of the course and the date of submission, and a list of references formatted according to the APA bibliographic standard. You may optionally use footnotes to cater for parenthetical argument and supporting

documentation while not breaking the flow of your main text. You may also use tables, diagrams, or visual materials if useful to support your argument.

Your essay should provide an informed and critical approach to the topic, question or issue you identified, not just based on adequate knowledge of the readings, concepts and examples introduced in the course, but also demonstrating your ability to identify further relevant scholarly works and examples from practice as appropriate. It will be assessed on the basis of the following criteria: originality and pertinence of the topic and approach, sound essay structure, clarity and cohesion, use of salient evidence, critical and informed consideration of relevant literature, good use of language, and quality of presentation.

A4. Course participation

In this course, participation includes your activities within the classroom and your contribution to the course's online forum. Class attendance will be monitored, and active, and constructive participation will be acknowledged (and rewarded) in your final grade. You will also be expected to contribute regularly on class topics, activities, and questions by posting to the course's online forum at <https://msl2500.slack.com>.

Through your participation, in class and online, you should show ability to 1) identify and represent concepts, approaches and methods related to the creation, curation and management of digital heritage resources, 2) account for and discuss critically important issues and questions related to digital heritage theory and practice, and, 3) engage with the applied concepts, methods and tools introduced in the course workshops.

Course Policies

Attendance

Regular on-time attendance in class is an important part of this course. If you miss class it is your responsibility to find out what you missed from your fellow students.

Evaluation

Please consult the iSchool's Grade Interpretation Guidelines (<http://current.ischool.utoronto.ca/grade-interpretation>) and the University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/grading.pdf>). These documents will form the basis for grading in the course.

Late assignments

A penalty of 2% per day will be imposed on every assignment if it is not handed in by the due date. Papers that are still outstanding 5 days after the due date will not be accepted. Extensions without penalty will only be granted to individual assignments in cases of legitimate illness or emergencies. Such extensions will not be granted for requests made on or after the due date for the assignment. This policy is to ensure fairness to all students.

Extensions beyond the end of term

Extensions beyond the term in which the course is taken are subject to guidelines established by the School of Graduate Studies (SGS). Please see:

<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/current/policies/coursework.asp>. “The authority to grant an extension for the completion of work in a course beyond the original SGS deadline for that course rests with the graduate unit in which the course was offered, not the instructor of the course.” Students must petition the graduate unit for extensions, using the SGS Extension to Complete Coursework form:

<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/Documents/Extension+to+Complete+Coursework.pdf>.

Academic integrity

Please consult the University's site on Academic Integrity

(<http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca/>). The iSchool has a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism as defined in section B.I.1.(d) of the University's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjun011995.pdf>). You should acquaint yourself with the Code. Please review the material in Cite it Right and if you require further clarification, consult the site How Not to Plagiarize (<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>).

Writing support

As stated in the iSchool's Grade Interpretation Guidelines, “work that is not well written and grammatically correct will not generally be considered eligible for a grade in the A range, regardless of its quality in other respects”. With this in mind, please make use of the writing support provided to graduate students by the SGS Office of English Language and Writing Support (<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/English-Language-and-Writing-Support.aspx>). The services are designed to target the needs of both native and non-native speakers and all programs are free. Please consult the current workshop schedule (<http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/currentstudents/Pages/Current-Years-Courses.aspx>) for more information.

Accommodations

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability or a health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Accessibility Services Office (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>) as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff are available by appointment to assess needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let them and I know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.