History of Recorded Information

I IST 402/502 3 Credits Spring 2015

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Prerequisites: None

Course Description:
An introduction to the history of how human beings have created, maintained, and preserved information for personal, official, and cultural purposes. Topics will include the development of writing, recordkeeping, and libraries; the emergence of printing and the history of the book; the evolution of recordkeeping by organizations, government, and individuals; and the impact of different technologies on the development of print and digital culture.

Course Objectives:
1. To introduce students to the evolution and impact of writing, recordkeeping, printing, and print culture.

2. To provide students with an understanding of the cultural, social and technological forces that have shaped and continue to shape recorded information.

3. To introduce students to different disciplinary perspectives on the history of records, archives, printing, and publishing.

Student Exit Competencies:
Students completing this course should

1. Understand the evolution of the creation and maintenance of recorded information in a variety of formats
2. Understand the social and cultural impact of different kinds of recorded information in different eras

3. Be familiar with key research themes in the history of recordkeeping and book history

For students in the M.S. in Information Science program, this course provides a historical background for understanding the nature of recorded information, the communication of recorded information, and the work of information professionals. Specifically it addresses the following objectives for graduates of the program:

2. Know the history and evolving roles of the information professional in the changing global society.

11. Understand the information environment and build collaborative relationships to strengthen information services and literacy.

Course Requirements:

1. Required readings and participation in class discussions.

2. Weekly readings paper. Each student will write two review papers of selected readings on the syllabus. This paper must be submitted electronically to the instructor by 7 p.m. the day before the class for which the reading is assigned. The length of the paper should be three to five double-spaced pages. Each paper should conclude with two or three questions addressed to the class in order to stimulate discussion.

3. Response paper. Each student will write a paper based on a reading of Lisa Gitelman’s *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*. This 1500-word paper (six double spaced pages) will analyze and respond to the arguments about different forms of documents discussed in the book. Due April 22.

4. Final Project. Each student will prepare a final project studying any one area in the broad scope of the history of recorded information. Graduate students will submit a research paper 15-20 pages long. Undergraduates will submit a research paper 10-15 pages long. All students will also make a formal presentation on their topics during the final class on May 6. The topic must be submitted to the instructor for approval no later than March 11. Further details will be handed out in class. The final papers are due May 6.

Evaluation of Student Performance will be based on:

1. Participation in class discussions  20%

2. Readings assignment  15%
3. Response paper  15%

4. Final project presentation  10%

5. Final project paper  40%

Since this class includes both undergraduate and graduate students, graduate students are expected to perform at a higher level to receive the same grade as undergraduates.

Teaching Methodologies:

1. Lectures
2. Discussions
3. Audio-visual presentations

Statement on Academic Dishonesty:

The Department of Information Studies takes academic dishonesty very seriously. Before taking classes within the Department of Information Studies, you should familiarize yourself with the department’s “Penalties and Procedures for Violations of Academic Integrity,” available online at http://www.albany.edu/informationstudies/ist_resources.php Professors reserve the right to add to the department’s policy as they see appropriate.

Outline of Course Content and Required Readings:

Two books containing required readings are available for purchase at the university bookstore:


The following book is on reserve in Dewey Library. Copies are easily available for purchase through abebooks.com:

Other readings can be accessed through the library’s Electronic Reserves on Blackboard, through the University Libraries e-journals, or through the web sites included on the syllabus.

January 21

Introduction to the Course

January 28 – No Class

February 4

The Nature of Documents.


Film: *Before the Alphabet*.

February 11

Ancient Writing. Orality and Literacy.


February 18

Documents and Records in the Ancient Greece and Rome.


February 25

Documents and Recordkeeping in the Middle Ages.


Film: *World Inscribed: The Illuminated Manuscript*.

March 4

Introduction to the History of the Book and the Development of Printing.


Hand-press Printing Demonstrated (video)  
http://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/blockbooks_printing_film

Film: *The Making of a Renaissance Book*.

**March 11**

The Impact of Printing. FINAL PAPER TOPIC DUE.


Film: *Alphabet: The Story of Writing, Part 3—Penman, Printer and Engraver*.

**March 18 — Break Week**

**March 25**

The Dominance of Print Culture.


Roger Chartier, “Communities of Readers” *Broadview Reader in Book History*, 251–66.


April 1

Making and Keeping Records.


April 8

Personal Records and Recordkeeping: Letters.

Levy, Scrolling Forward, pp. 78–100.


April 15

Personal Records and Recordkeeping: Diaries.


April 22

Evolving Forms of Documents. RESPONSE PAPER DUE.


April 29

Moving into the Digital Era.


May 6

Final Project Presentations. Course wrap-up. FINAL PAPER DUE.