

Summer II 2008  
3 credit hours  
9:00 – 11:50 am MTWR  
2309 South Kohrman  
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### Course Description

An advanced seminar course that explores possibilities for automating the telling and reading of stories by time and place, from different points of view. Students will document the study of a topic, making digital recordings. All files will be timestamped and placestamped. Arrays of data in several media, structured by time and place, will be composed as different narratives about the topics.

### The Challenge

The challenge for students will be to develop data navigation concepts, or ways of interacting with data (user interfaces), for telling and reading individual and community stories by time and place. These concepts might help us find new ways to translate *data* into *information* and *knowledge*.

### Course Structure

A question will be asked at the beginning of the course: How can large data sets arrayed by time and place tell meaningful stories about events experienced from different points of view? Together, we will explore answers to this question through research, discussion, and our work.

During the first few weeks of the semester students will develop topic ideas for storytelling. Topics should be limited to the Kalamazoo area. Topic selections could afford overlaps (geographic, subject, etc.) among students, who might choose to organize themselves as teams. Examples of topics, or areas that topics could be drawn from, might include: academic or career interests or pursuits; social or other issues; politics; causes; wayfinding; an exhibition guide; sculpture tour; historic building tour; archeological mapping; environmental communication; urban change; an experiment, creation, performance; etc.

Explorations of selected topics, utilizing community resources, will be documented in digital image, sound, motion, text, or other recordings (e.g. sensor, quantitative, qualitative data). All files will be tagged with metadata timestamps and placestamps, and will be uploaded to a class server. The many thousands of recordings made during the semester will, in effect, become a dimensional construct defined by three axes: time, place, and views. Time will be a specified period during the semester. Place will be a specified geographic area. Views, or points of view, will be those of the students in the class.

As the recordings are aggregated during the semester, students will begin to develop, individually and collaboratively, ways to read data as stories by time, place, and different points of view. A variety of hardware, software, and Webware tools will be explored in the creation of working, simulated, or conceptual interactive storytelling interfaces.

This applied research is a step toward finding new ways to translate *data* into *information* and *knowledge* that is more readily accessible, to wider audiences, with greater immediacy and relevancy than extant media models. Results will be presented to those in the community who participated, to our academic community, and to interested others, in hopes of suggesting future projects, sparking synergies, and identifying potential larger applications to develop.

The success, personal enrichment, and learning value of the course will depend largely upon the mix of students and their creative, imaginative, and pragmatic problem solving abilities. We will learn from one another.

### Studio and Fieldwork

Class time will include: teaching, discussions, work, collaboration, process review, presentations, and critiques.

Work outside class will include: research, reading, and observation; ideation and development; fieldwork studying and documenting topics; tagging and uploading files; exploring data navigation concepts.

### What This Course *Is* and *Is Not* About

This course is about finding new ways to tell stories with digital media – through exploration, discovery, and invention. It is a quest to find better ways to use digital media to share experiences.

This course is not about making art or creative writing or Web design; though it could be useful and applicable for people in those and many other fields. This course is not about teaching hardware or software.

This course is more of a *what if* course than a *how to* course.

### Who Should Take This Course

This course is open to all WMU students. Hopefully it will attract a wide range of students from diverse studies across campus.

Applications in *visual arts, music, theater, and dance* could include: creation, process documentation, display, exhibition, and performance.

Applications in *history and literature* could include: research, study, documentation, and creation.

Applications in *anthropology, geography, and sociology* could include: field research, observation research, mapping, geographic information systems, study, and documentation.

Applications in *many other fields* that involve technology, physical sciences, communication, or information management could include: experimental research, design process, communication process and production, information technology, and myriad other development processes and professional activities.

### Prerequisites

There are no specific course prerequisites; however, computer skills, an ability to work independently, inventive thinking, and a serious interest in one's own work will be most useful.

## Seven Weeks

During the seven weeks of the course:

*Thursday, 26 June*

Get acquainted, course overview, introduction to topics and media.

*Monday and Tuesday, 30 June and 1 July **Colloquium***

Colloquium with guest presenters (approximately 12), and brief discussions about applicability to topics and storytelling.

*Wednesday and Thursday, 2 and 3 July*

Topic discussions and storytelling idea development.

*Three weeks, 7 – 24 July **Topic study***

Monday briefings in class; Tuesdays – Thursdays fieldwork. Students will work independently or as teams during these three weeks. Topics will be determined by Monday, 7 July, when each student will submit a statement describing proposed topic and media. The instructor will schedule individual and/or team meetings in the classroom or in the field to work with students on process and monitor progress. During the week of 21 July students should begin considering interface possibilities.

*Three weeks, 28 July – 14 August **Storytelling interfaces***

Students will develop interfaces during the final three weeks of the semester. In class on Thursday, 14 August, students will present interface concepts for storytelling by time and place.

These are target dates. Realistically, timeframes may move forward or backward during July. Condensed summer semesters require a greater number of hours of work per week than Fall and Spring semesters. However, the nature of the independent fieldwork for this course allows students greater time flexibility during much of the semester. Individualized experiential learning is an important aspect of the course.

## Colloquium

During the first few days of the semester, while we're getting acquainted and discussing work for the semester, a number of resource people will make brief presentations about tools and applications for developing storytelling topics by time and place. These might include:

- Geography, GIS, and GPS
- Metadata tags
- Photography and intermedia
- Geographic change
- Hardware tools
- Software tools
- Webware tools
- Storytelling
- Storytelling in the visual arts
- Storytelling in the performance arts
- History
- Bibliographic instruction (Archives)
- Graphic novels as narrative

Several of the presenters and others have graciously offered to assist students develop topics related to their areas.

## Topics

Each student will study one topic of his or her choice all semester. As described above, during the first week of class we will explore together various ideas for topics that afford time and place storytelling opportunities. Independent work or concurrent course work could be documented in this course. Students might choose to work in teams on a topic or in a medium. Students will study topics in the field for about three weeks.

Students are encouraged to utilize local community or academic resources in developing and exploring their topics. Resources might help students find information, afford access to topic subject matter, and provide input and guidance along the way.

A few topic ideas to stimulate thinking:

- Ward Morgan photo collection
- Public history
- Archives
- WMU 100 years
- Historic neighborhoods, downtown districts
- Home tours, historic preservation
- vanishedkalamazoo.com
- Heritage Company, recycling architectural artifacts
- Geographic change over time
- The Kalamazoo Farmer's Market, farmers, farms
- Power of place
- Rites of passage
- Activism, causes, missions, and ministries
- Transforming lives
- Local oral histories
- Social history
- Cultural history
- Material culture
- Creating a virtual world
- Wayfinding
- Environmental communication
- Integration of bird's eye, aerial, other spatial views with imagery
- Interactive campus map
- Documenting creation, exhibition, and performance
- Sculpture Tour
- Installation of an exhibition and viewer response
- Documenting WMU orientation
- Documenting an experiment
- Scientific research
- Local paper industry legacy, environmental cleanup
- Archaeological study of Asylum Lake Preserve
- All politics are local, geo-political factors
- Public safety ride along
- Neighborhood crime related to geo-economic factors
- Fictional, mythical, hypertext fiction
- Making things, making points, telling stories
- Memory, memory loss

These only begin to scratch the surface of possibilities for exploring art, artifacts, history, culture, society, creativity, invention, process, behavior, activity, etc. by time and place.

For example, digitizing history for access, preservation, and research:

All of recorded history presents opportunities for storytelling. The Digitization Center in Waldo Library offers many topic possibilities. One of their projects, a collection of photographs by Ward Morgan from the mid-twentieth century in the Kalamazoo area is online at several Websites. The collection is indexed with a number of metadata tags, however not with geotags. What stories might be told if selections of photos from the collection were recreated with current geotagged photos and other information?

Another, interpreting art for access, understanding, and meaning:

A WMU sculpture exhibition program across the campus landscape during the past 15 years has offered substantive encounters with a variety of artistic forms that sometimes challenge viewer thinking. The program has been described in printed brochures over the years. What stories might be told if an interactive virtual Sculpture Tour was structured by time and place, with geotagged photos and other interpretative and documentary information describing artists, creation, process, environments, settings, media, viewer reactions, etc.?

Another, telling stories about where and how people live:

The homes on Davis Street in Kalamazoo, were built from north to south between the mid-1800s and mid-1900s. What stories might be told about people, events, architecture, etc. if a few city blocks were studied and documented by time and place?

Another, telling stories about farmers:

Local fruits, vegetables, and flowers are at their peak during this semester. The Farmer's Market in Kalamazoo is a wonderfully delicious and colorful place this time of year. It is a place for shopping and socializing. And it is a marketplace for farmers. What stories might be told about farmers if their daily and weekly work cycles, and products of their work, were documented by time and place?

These are but a few examples of storytelling from the list of topics above. There are infinite possibilities for storytelling from different points of view among these and any number of topics.

We will be discovering, as a class, ways that meaningful stories might be told and read by time and place.

## Storytelling

Students will be considering storytelling media options as they develop ideas for their topics. During the three weeks beginning 7 July students will work in the field, researching, studying, and documenting their work digitally. Students may work in any digital media, using any combinations of hardware, software, and Webware.

### *Hardware tools*

Our classroom is a computer and print lab. Server space will be available for class use. A camera that records GPS coordinates in image metadata will be available for student use. Attempts could be made to secure the use of specialized hardware if appropriate (for example, motion capture). Students will generally be expected to provide, or have access to, their own primary digital recording devices (mobile phone, computer, camera, Webcam, video, sound, etc.). Depending upon the nature of topics that students choose, and upon the media they choose to work in, it is anticipated that some technical support will be available in the course.

### *Software tools*

Microsoft, Apple, and Adobe applications are installed on classroom computers. Students may use any software programs they have access to, are familiar with, or want to learn. Time and place stories may be developed in any program, ranging from word processing and presentation software to design, animation, still image, and video.

### *Webware tools*

Students are also encouraged to explore and consider the time and place storytelling potential of platforms like Google Earth, Flickr, and Second Life, or Webware tools for mapping, making timelines, file sharing, etc.

## Time, Place, Viewpoints, and Interfaces

All recordings will be timestamped and placestamped (various options will be discussed in class). Working in any media as described above, students will explore possibilities for storytelling by time, place, and different points of view.

*Time*: while course work will span only seven weeks, study topics could span centuries. *Place*: course topics will focus on the Kalamazoo area. *Points of view*: students' explorations of selected topics will generate large quantities of data, affording many points of view about different aspects of specific places over time. These points of view, arrayed by time and place, composed as different narratives, will automate the telling and reading of many different stories.

Storytelling interfaces could be working, simulated or conceptual. *Working* interfaces, for example, could be demonstrated in Google Earth, on a file sharing platform, or in a mapping program. Interfaces could be *simulated*, for example, in Flash, or in an animation or gaming program. *Conceptual* interfaces could be visualized in storyboards or a presentation program.

Interface possibilities could range from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 to Web 3.0 or beyond, and could be graphical, zoomable, textual, and/or auditory, and could be controlled by any means.

## Journal Club

No textbook is required for this course. Instead, we will draw upon a variety of resources to inform our thinking. In order to structure and facilitate studying and sharing, a “journal club” will be developed as a means of synthesizing information. Distinguished somewhat from book clubs and literature circles, the idea of journal clubs grew out of medical and scientific needs to scan large volumes of information quickly and efficiently, and importantly, to critically evaluate relevant material.

We’ll have discussions on Mondays, beginning sometime during fieldwork, about subjects of students’ choices. Hopefully the subjects will range widely. They could be related directly, indirectly, or not at all, to topics or media. The discussions will be another means of exploring storytelling by time, place, and points of view. These discussions should contribute significantly and substantively to learning during the course.

Students are encouraged to find their own readings, reflect on books they’ve already read, or select from a reading and browsing list. Students are not expected to read complete books, but rather scan them for relevant ideas to discuss.

## Grading

Students will be graded on:

Motivation and participation throughout the semester;  
Topic development during the first half of the semester; and  
Storytelling development during the second half of the semester.

In general, the instructor will evaluate seriousness of purpose, integrity of work effort, research and development efforts, and breadth and scope of exploration and discovery activities.

## Recap and Cosmic Glue

This is the first time that *Time&place-based Media* is being offered. It is a synthesis of a body of the instructor's work. It will be a course of exploration, discovery, and invention for the instructor as well as for the students. *What if* we could find new ways to tell stories by time and place from different points of view with digital media?

The course should be enriching and enjoyable. This course is not intended to be very technical, although we will be working with technology. This course is not about creating art, although some students may find creative ways to tell stories. This course is not about information theory, although the instructor passionately believes that data should more readily yield meaningful information and knowledge. Storytelling is applicable in all of life and in all fields of endeavor. This course is a quest to find some of those applications.

This course will be different from many others that students have taken in their major, minor, and elective areas. It is not about a specific subject. It is applicable to all subjects.

Storytelling is found in every culture, in all of recorded history, in every land. Over the years, storytelling has been a means of entertainment, art, education, communication, and preserving history and culture.

In the oldest oral traditions, stories became collective works as they were passed from one generation to another over millennia. As technologies advanced, stories in print and other linear media could be accurately replicated as they were passed along. They became individual works affording a version of a story, sometimes with an authoritative cachet. Advancing technologies (now digital media) afford the possibility of collective storytelling once again. Let's explore that possibility together!