

Hist2625/DCS 2550
Mapping American History Using Geographic Information Systems
Fall 2021

Instructors

Prof. Patrick Rael

[Sign up for office hours here](#) (do your best to give me 24 hours notice)

[Zoom link for office hours](#)

Dr. Aaron Gilbreath

[Book an appointment here:](#)

Class Meetings

MWF 1:15 PM – 2:10 PM (May combine asynchronous, and synchronous)

Description

In this intermediate seminar we will use Geographic Information Systems to explore historical problems in 19th-century US history. We will introduce and practice basic statistical techniques, and use the class GIS database to investigate problems, construct our own historical datasets, and make our own maps. Class projects will challenge students to develop critical thinking skills in historical and computational methods, and practice effective data presentation. We will work with a wide array of history data, including information on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, agriculture, slavery, and voting behavior in the period in question. Throughout, we will probe the possibilities and limitations of GIS as a digital technology and methodological approach to historical analysis.

Course Level

This course is cross-listed in Digital and Computational Studies and History. It fulfills the MCSR Distribution requirement, and the Social and Behavioral Science Division requirements.

As an Intermediate Seminar in the History Department, the course is open to all students, yet is particularly suited for those with some experience in college-level history courses. If you are a first-year student or require help, please see us during office hours. We expect students to spend at least two hours in personal study on this course for every hour spent in class. This time should be spent reading, reviewing class notes, and preparing course assignments.

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge: How did time and space shape the history and geography of the United States in the nineteenth century?

Methods: How can quantitative methods help us develop and address questions about 'what happened and why?'

Meaning: What are the possibilities and limitations of GIS and quantitative methods for History? How do our methods define and delimit what we can learn?

Assignment Structure

1. **Weekly exercises** (8 @ 5% each = 40% total): Each week we'll introduce you to new skills in working with quantitative data and GIS. These exercises will challenge you to practice those skills.

2. **Content Assessments** (20%): For eight of the weeks we will directly engage a different historical topic, a take-home assessment will be due on Monday. We will drop your lowest grade on these and average the rest; this will constitute 20% of your course grade.

3. **Final project** (30%): You'll work in groups or individually on a final project that will challenge you to define a historical problem and address it using GIS. You may use class data, but will also be building your own datasets from sources you find. Please be thinking early on about possible group partners and subjects.

4. **Class participation** (10%)

Acknowledging Sources

Each author owns his or her own ideas, words, and research. You must give appropriate credit — generally in the form of quotations and proper citations — when using the work of another scholar. Plagiarism, whether intentional or not, is a serious violation of academic standards and Bowdoin's honor code. Please read Bowdoin's honor code, and Bowdoin's general guidelines for proper citation and attribution of sources

In your papers for this course, you will need to use Chicago/Turabian footnotes to acknowledge your sources. You need not include a Bibliography unless you consult sources outside of course material (e.g., your final paper). We use Chicago/Turabian citation style in History. You may learn more by consulting a YouTube video I have made for this purpose, and guides available under the "Resources" tab on my homepage – notably, those on Citation Basics and the Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide.

Challenging Content

Education at this level sometimes requires us to encounter material we find offensive and objectionable. Views expressed in the material we will cover do not necessarily reflect my own opinions. By continuing with this course, you are agreeing to be held academically accountable for all required materials in the syllabus, regardless of your own personal reactions to it. The academic enterprise invites vibrant class discussion, which balances critical thinking with mutual respect. Students are expected to take responsibility for their experience in this course by examining their own reactions to material they consider offensive. At all times, our priority will be critical engagement with scholarly material. Students uncomfortable with this approach are encouraged to drop this course at their discretion. Education at this level sometimes requires us to encounter material we find offensive and objectionable. Views expressed in the material we will cover do not necessarily reflect my own opinions. By continuing with this course, you are agreeing to be held academically accountable for all required materials in the syllabus, regardless of your own personal reactions to it. The academic enterprise invites vibrant class discussion, which balances critical thinking with mutual respect. Students are expected to take responsibility for their experience in this course by examining their own reactions to material they consider offensive. At all times, our priority will be critical engagement with scholarly material. Students uncomfortable with this approach are encouraged to drop this course at their discretion.

If you need accommodations

Students with documented accommodations have a right to have these met. I encourage you to see me in the first two week of class to discuss how your accommodations may support your learning process in this course. I highly encourage all students to meet with me in the first few weeks of class to discuss your learning preferences, challenges you may face learning this semester, and how we can create an effective learning experience for you.

Inclusiveness

It is our intent that students from all backgrounds and perspectives receive equitable access and opportunity in this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is our intent to employ materials and engage in activities and dialogue that are respectful of: gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture. Please share your preferences for your name and pronouns.

Bowdoin College is committed to ensuring access to learning opportunities for all students. Students seeking accommodations based on disabilities must register with the Student Accessibility Office. Please discuss any special needs or accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your needs; we

are eager to work with you to ensure that your approved accommodations are appropriately implemented. If you have questions about requesting accommodations or concerns about approved accommodations, please contact Lesley Levy (llevy@bowdoin.edu), director of student accessibility.

Confidentiality

We are considered Officers of the College, and therefore have a Title IX responsibility to report instances of harassment and violence to the institution. Several groups and organizations at Bowdoin College exist to help prevent sexual- and gender-based harassment and violence.