

FYSM 1611-C
Ancestry.com, Big Data & The Politics of Identity
Wednesdays – 8:35 – 11:25am
River Building/Richcraft Hall (RB) - Room 3110

GENERAL INFORMATION

Instructor: Hailey-Ann Walker

Office Hours: Every Wednesday from 12:00pm-2:00pm or by appointment.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION & LEARNING OUTCOMES

Course Description:

This course examines how Ancestry.com has transformed personal and familial genealogy from the niche pursuit of family tree hobbyists into a multi-billion-dollar industry. Ancestry.com has amassed an astonishing digitized database of over 60 billion archival artefacts and over 25 million DNA results from around the world. What does it mean to have ancestral and genetic data digitized and at our fingertips? Who is invested in the digitization and marketization of this data and what is at stake? In what ways has Ancestry.com blurred the public-private divide and transformed the way population information is consolidated, deployed, and governed? How does Ancestry.com reinforce and/or transform the way we think and talk about identity, history, place and belonging? In what ways does looking to genealogy and the marketization of genealogy help us develop a sharper understanding of contemporary problems and logics of government? By pondering these questions (among others) the course will not only help students to understand the sociopolitical significance and implications of Ancestry.com but to critically analyze and understand perennial political topics like identity, power, history, and government.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Analyze the governmental and political implications of genealogical practice, its history, and its contemporary manifestations
- Analyze the governmental and political implications of genealogical and genetic “big data”
- Analyze the political significance of the archive and archival governance
- Critically analyze the relationship between government and subjectivity
- Engage in critical analyses that “un-work” commonplace political understandings of identity, power, history, and government
- Understand the analytic value of localized problematizations to bring theoretical ideas to life

COURSE FORMAT & DELIVERY

The course consists of live, in-person and interactive seminars delivered every Wednesday from 8:35am until 11:25am in Room 3110 of the River Building/Richcraft Hall (3110 RB) over the course of the Fall 2024 term. Students are expected to attend and participate in lectures every week from Wednesday, September 4th, 2024, through Wednesday, December 4th, 2024, with the exception of Wednesday, October 23rd 2024 when we will break for reading week.

COURSE TEXTBOOK & READINGS

There is no required textbook to be purchased for this course. All course readings will be made available on the course Brightspace page in the form of downloadable PDF documents. Students are responsible for accessing and reading course materials directly from Brightspace ahead of each lecture. Readings can be found on Brightspace under the titled and dated tabs for each week.

COURSE EVALUATION AT A GLANCE

Assignment	Due Date	Value
Course Participation	Ongoing	10%
Comprehension Quizzes	1 quiz every 2 weeks for 6 weeks	5% each quiz, total 30%
Reading Response	Thursday October 10 th by 11:59pm	10%
Term Paper Proposal	Thursday November 21 st by 11:59pm	20%
Term Paper	Friday December 6 th by 11:59pm	30%

COURSE EVALUATION IN DETAIL

1. Participation

All students are expected to be active participants in the course. Participation in the course will account for 10% of your final grade. Assessment of participation will happen in two ways:

- **Participation in live seminars every Wednesday.** This includes asking questions or offering comments/opinions on course materials, raising points for discussion, or making connections between course materials and outside materials or events.
- **Participation in assignments and assessments.** In order to get full participation marks, you must submit all course assignments and take all course quizzes. Unless extenuating circumstances have been discussed, students will not get the full 10% for participation if any assignments or quizzes are outstanding at the end of the term.

2. Comprehension Quizzes

Every other Friday (starting Friday September 20th) students will complete a Brightspace quiz on course readings and lectures. Quizzes will remain open from 9am on Friday morning until 9pm Sunday evening every other week. Each quiz is worth 5% of your final grade and there will be a total of 6 quizzes throughout our 6-week term (meaning quizzes will count for 30% of your final grade, cumulatively).

Every quiz will be 10 questions long. Please note that the quizzes will be taken on your own time, on Brightspace. They are also open book, meaning you are permitted to use your readings, lecture content, and notes during the quiz. However, please understand that you only get one chance to take each quiz and once you begin you must complete it within 20 minutes. As such, be sure to study and get yourself organized before sitting down to complete the quiz so you're not wasting time frantically searching through course materials to find answers. It is highly recommended that you complete all readings, attend live seminars, take notes, and study them ahead of each quiz.

Please note, each quiz will only be accessible from Friday morning until Sunday evening each week. If you do not complete the quiz in this window, you will not be permitted to take it at

another time (unless extenuating circumstances have been discussed with the professor *ahead of time – retroactive requests to take a quiz that has already passed will not be approved*).

3. Reading Response – Due Thursday, October 10th, 2024

For the Reading Response assignment, students are asked to write an argumentative response to course materials which both demonstrates comprehension of *and* makes connection between at least three of the readings from Weeks 1-5. Students can choose whichever three readings they wish, but the three chosen must come from different weeks. The reading response should be structured and should include a clear line of argumentation about how the readings you have chosen are connected (or different). No outside sources are required for this assignment, though you are permitted to use outside references or events to illustrate your understanding. Course materials must be used and cited consistently/correctly.

It is crucial that students understand they are not being asked to merely describe or summarize the theoretical approach they choose – *do not merely tell me about the theory or summarize the authors we have read in class*. Instead, focus on making dynamic connections that demonstrate your comprehension of each author’s contributions and your ability to analyze them in relation to one another. More detailed assignment instructions will be provided on Brightspace.

This assignment is due Thursday October 10th, 2024. The Reading Response should be ~2500 words, double-spaced and using Times New Roman 12-point font. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and argumentative coherence will be graded. Make sure to proofread your work for before submitting.

4. Term Paper Proposal – Due November 21st, 2024 by 11:59pm via Brightspace

This assignment is designed to help students prepare for the final term paper for the course. Typically, the Term Paper Proposal (and of course the Term Paper itself) requires students to identify a particular case/event/problem that can be analyzed using the themes and theoretical concepts we have discussed in the course (the politics of genealogy, the marketization of genealogy, the politics of the archive, the politics of genetic and genealogical data/digitization, the politics of identity, archival governmentalities + subjectivities, etc.). Please note, students are permitted (and encouraged!) to choose their own topic entirely, but a list of potential topic ideas will be provided on Brightspace as well.

The following components should be included in the Term Paper Proposal:

- A provisional title for your Term Paper
- The specific case or problem the paper/you will focus on
- A succinct and focused research question that you hope to ‘answer’ with your argument
- A succinct and focused thesis statement (2-3 sentences max.) that includes the main argument you will make, a concise statement explaining the reasoning behind that argument (sub-arguments), and a concise statement of the wider significance of your argument
- A brief breakdown of your sub-arguments and how they will be used to develop your main argument.
- A list of 3 secondary sources with a small blurb (2-3 sentences max.) explaining how you will use the source in service of your argument.

It is important that students understand that this is merely a *planning* assignment. You should not be writing an actual paper or trying to defend your argument at length here. The entire goal is to

help you create a game-plan or a roadmap for your final paper. It is also important for students to understand that this assignment is not a binding contract. While the assignment is designed to help prepare you for the Term Paper, you are not entirely beholden to the proposal. If you develop new ideas or questions after the proposal has been submitted, you are more than welcome to make these changes when writing the final paper. If you are unsure about how changes will impact your argument, please reach out to me by email before writing the paper. Further, it is not acceptable to change your topic entirely without coming to the professor for approval first.

This assignment should be no more than 1-2 pages long, double-spaced and using Times New Roman 12-point font. In addition to the requirements listed above, spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and structural cohesion will be assessed.

5. Term Paper – Due Friday, December 6th, 2024

This assignment asks students to write a research essay and form a concrete and original argument on a topic related to course themes. This paper should be written based on the roadmap created in the *Term Paper Proposal* assignment listed above.

Again, while students are not entirely beholden to their *Proposal* assignment, it is strongly recommended that students use the *Proposal* assignment and the feedback they receive on that assignment to structure their final Term Paper. Term Papers will be graded based on the quality of each student's writing, research, analytic depth, comprehension of course materials, argumentative coherence & originality.

This assignment should be no more than 10-12 pages long, double-spaced, using Times New Roman, 12-point font. In addition to the grading metrics listed above, spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and structural cohesion will be assessed. **This assignment is due Friday December 6th by 11:59pm via Brightspace.**

Extension Requests & Late Assignments

Students are expected to complete and submit all assignments by the designated due date. However, I understand that sometimes life takes us by surprise. If you require an extension on an assignment or quiz, **please reach out to me at least 3 days before the due date wherever possible.** Please note that if you do not reach out to me ahead of time, extensions will not be granted after-the-fact.

There is a 24-hour grace period after each assignment due date (quizzes do not have a 24-hour grace period as they automatically close at the specified time). Any assignments submitted after the 24-hour grace period will receive a one-time deduction of 10%. Any outstanding assignments not submitted by Monday December 9th will not be accepted and will be graded at 0.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – September 4th, 2024 – Introductions & Syllabus

During our first class, we will get to know one another, go over the course outline together in detail, discuss the key course themes and learning objectives, and set clear expectations and goals for our time together. Students will have the opportunity to ask questions or get

clarification on anything they remain unsure about after reading the course outline. **Please note that the course syllabus will also be posted on Brightspace under the course information tab. Please make sure you read the syllabus carefully and in full. Any changes to the syllabus will be communicated to students clearly.**

No required readings for Week 1

Week 2 – September 11th, 2024 – A Genealogy of Genealogy

Required reading:

Sharpe, Michael. 2011. “This Ancestry Business” in *Family Matters: A History of Genealogy*. Pen & Sword: South Yorkshire, pp. 15-59.

Morgan, Francesca. 2021. “Introduction” in *A Nation of Descendants: Politics & The Practice of Genealogy in US History*,” Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1-16.

Laqueur, Thomas. 2023. “The Pocahontas Exception” in *London Review of Books*, 45(7).

Week 3 – September 18th, 2024 – The Mormon Ancestry of Ancestry.com

Required reading:

Akenson, Donald Harman. 2007. “Prologue,” “Yesterday’s News,” and “What do the Mormons Think?” in *Some Family: The Mormons and How Humanity Keeps Track of Itself*, Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 3-50.

Morgan, Francesca. 2021. “Yours, for the Dead” in *A Nation of Descendants: Politics & The Practice of Genealogy in US History*,” Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 52-67.

QUIZ # 1 opens Friday September 20th, 2024, via Brightspace – Quiz opens at 9:00am on Friday and closes on at 9:00pm Sunday. You have one attempt to complete the quiz and must finish it within 20 minutes once you begin.

Week 4 – September 25th, 2024 – Power & Subjectivity

Required reading:

Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1*. New York: Vintage, 92-102

Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish* (trans. A. Sheridan), London: Penguin, 24-31; 195-203.

Foucault, Michel. 1984. “The Subject and Power,” in *Critical Inquiry*, 40(8), 777-795.

Week 5 – October 2nd, 2024 – Governmentality

Required reading:

Walters, William & Jens Henrik Haahr. 2005. "Governmentality and Political Studies," in *European Political Science*, 4(3): 288-300.

Bernays, Edward. 1947. "The Engineering of Consent" in *The Annals of the American Academy*, 250(1), 113-120.

QUIZ # 2 opens Friday October 4th, 2024, via Brightspace – Quiz opens at 9:00am on Friday and closes on Sunday at 9:00pm. You have one attempt to complete the quiz and must finish it within 20 minutes once you begin.

Week 6 – October 9th, 2024 – Archival Politics

Required reading:

Pell, Susan. 2015. "Radicalizing the Politics of the Archive: An Ethnographic Reading of an Activist Archive" in *Archivaria* 80, pp. 33-57.

READING RESPONSE DUE THURSDAY OCTOBER 10th by 11:59pm on Brightspace

Week 7 – October 16th, 2024 – The Politics of Data

Required reading:

Isin, Engin, Evelyn Ruppert, & Didier Bigo. 2019. "Data Politics 1" in *Data Politics: Worlds, Subjects, Rights*. Oxford: Routledge, pp. 1-17.

Draper, Nora, and Joseph Turow. 2019. 'The corporate cultivation of digital resignation', *New Media & Society*, 21 (8): 1824-1839.

QUIZ # 3 opens Friday October 18th, 2024, via Brightspace – Quiz opens at 9:00am on Friday and closes on Sunday at 9:00pm. You have one attempt to complete the quiz and must finish it within 20 minutes once you begin.

Week 8 – October 23rd, 2024 – READING WEEK

No assignments or quizzes over reading week. Enjoy time with your family and friends. Stay up to date on course readings. Start thinking about and working on your term paper proposals.

Week 9 – October 30th, 2024 – Digitized Genealogy

Required reading:

Thylstrup, Nanna Bonde. 2019. "Understanding Mass Digitization" in *The Politics of Mass Digitization*, MIT Press, pp. 3-33.

Miller, Katja. 2021. "Theorizing Digital Archives: Power Access and New Order" in *Digital Archives & Collections: Creating Online Access to Cultural Heritage*, New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 24-55.

QUIZ # 4 opens Friday November 1st, 2024 via Brightspace – Quiz opens at 9:00am on Friday and closes on at 9:00pm Sunday. You have one attempt to complete the quiz and must finish it within 20 minutes once you begin.

Week 10 – November 6th, 2024 – Genetics, Economics, Identity

Required reading:

Abel, Sarah & Krystal S. Tsosie. 2020. "Family History and the Global Politics of DNA." *International Public History*, 2(2): 1-3.

Bliss, Catherine. 2013. "The Marketization of Identity Politics." *Sociology*, 47(5): 1011-1025.

Garrison, Nanibaa' A. 2018. "Genetic Ancestry Testing with Tribes: Ethics, Identity, & Health Implications." *Daedalus*, 147(2): 60-69.

Week 11 – November 13th, 2024 – Ethnicity, Power, & Politics

Required reading:

Robinson-Sweet, Anna. 2021. "Ancestry.com's Race Stories: Examining Whiteness on the Genealogy Web." *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion*, 5(1): 76-96.

Cya, Michelle. 2022. "The Curious Case of Gina Adams: A "Pretendian" Investigation" in *Maclean's Magazine*. September 6th, 2022.

QUIZ # 5 opens Friday November 15th, 2024 via Brightspace – Quiz opens at 9:00am on Friday and closes on at 9:00pm Sunday. You have one attempt to complete the quiz and must finish it within 20 minutes once you begin.

Week 12 – November 20th, 2024 – Everybody's Got a Story

Required reading:

Davis, Joseph E. 2003. "The Commodification of Self." *The Hedgehog Review* 5(2): 41- 49.

Film:

Curtis, Adam. 2002. "Part I – Happiness Machines" in *Century of the Self*, BBC.

Week 13 – November 27th, 2024 – Everybody's Got a Story II

Required reading:

Oksala, Johanna. 2023. Neoliberal Subjectivation: Between Foucault and Marx” *Critical Inquiry* 49:4, pp. 581-604.

Film:

Curtis, Adam. 2002. “Part II – The Engineering of Consent” and “Part III – There is a Policeman Inside our Heads and he Must be Destroyed” in *Century of the Self*, BBC.

QUIZ #6 opens Friday November 29th, 2024 via Brightspace – Quiz opens at 9:00am on Friday and closes on at 9:00pm Sunday. You have one attempt to complete the quiz and must finish it within 20 minutes once you begin.

Week 14 – December 4th, 2024 – Course De-Brief, Term Paper Prep

For our final meeting, we will spend the first half of the class workshopping your term papers together as a group. You can share ideas, offer each other feedback, and ask questions to your peers and the professor. In the second half, we will have an informal discussion about key takeaways from the course and new scholarly questions that have emerged as a result of our critical engagements. You also will have the ability to share what you enjoyed about the course, what you found challenging, and how you think the course could be improved.

TERM PAPER DUE FRIDAY DECEMBER 6th, 2024, by 11:59pm on Brightspace

Appendix

Student Mental Health

As a university student, you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. Here is a list that may be helpful:

Emergency Resources (on and off campus): <https://carleton.ca/health/emergencies-and-crisis/emergency-numbers/>

- **Carleton Resources:**

- Mental Health and Wellbeing: <https://carleton.ca/wellness/>
- Health & Counselling Services: <https://carleton.ca/health/>
- Paul Menton Centre: <https://carleton.ca/pmc/>
- Academic Advising Centre (AAC): <https://carleton.ca/academicadvising/>
- Centre for Student Academic Support (CSAS): <https://carleton.ca/csas/>
- Equity & Inclusivity Communities: <https://carleton.ca/equity/>

- **Off Campus Resources:**

- Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region: (613) 238-3311 or TEXT: 343-306-5550, <https://www.dcottawa.on.ca/>
- Mental Health Crisis Service: (613) 722-6914, 1-866-996-0991, <http://www.crisisline.ca/>
- Empower Me: 1-844-741-6389, <https://students.carleton.ca/services/empower-me-counselling-services/>
- Good2Talk: 1-866-925-5454, <https://good2talk.ca/>
- The Walk-In Counselling Clinic: <https://walkincounselling.com>

Requests for Academic Accommodation

Deferred final exams, which must be applied for at the RO, are available ONLY if the student is in good standing in the course. The course outline must stipulate any minimum standards for good standing that a student must meet to be entitled to write a deferred final exam.

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request, the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy accommodation: Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For accommodation regarding a formally-scheduled final exam, you must complete the Pregnancy Accommodation Form ([click here](#)).

Religious accommodation: Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details [click here](#).

Accommodations for students with disabilities: If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation, or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, reach out to your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. For more details, [click here](#).

Accommodation for student activities: Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and to the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom. Reasonable accommodation will be provided to students who engage in student activities at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more information, please [click here](#).

For more information on academic accommodation, please contact the departmental administrator or visit: students.carleton.ca/course-outline.

Sexual Violence Policy

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated. Survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is an essential element of a productive and successful career as a student. Carleton's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) addresses academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, misrepresentation, impersonation, withholding of records, obstruction/interference, disruption of instruction or examinations, improper access to and/or dissemination of information, or violation of test and examination rules. Students are required to familiarize themselves with the university's academic integrity rules.

Plagiarism

The Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentional or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.” This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else’s published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one’s own without proper citation or reference to the original source. Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include, but are not limited to: books, articles, papers, websites, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, art works, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations.

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- Any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else;
- Using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- Using another’s data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- Submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one’s own; and

- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Unless explicitly permitted by the instructor in a particular course, any use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to produce assessed content (e.g., text, code, equations, image, summary, video, etc.) is considered a violation of academic integrity standards.

Procedures in Cases of Suspected Violations

Violations of the Academic Integrity Policy are serious offences which cannot be resolved directly with the course's instructor. When an instructor suspects a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy, the Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student. Penalties are not trivial. They may include a mark of zero for the assignment/exam in question or a final grade of "F" for the course. More information on the University's Academic Integrity Policy can be found at: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>.

Intellectual property

Student or professor materials created for this course (including presentations and posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments and exams) remain the intellectual property of the author(s). They are intended for personal use and may not be reproduced or redistributed without prior written consent of the author(s).

Submission and Return of Term Work

Papers must be submitted directly to the instructor according to the instructions in the course outline. The departmental office will not accept assignments submitted in hard copy.

Grading

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor, subject to the approval of the faculty Dean. Final standing in courses will be shown by alphabetical grades. The system of grades used, with corresponding grade points is:

Percentage	Letter grade	12-point scale	Percentage	Letter grade	12-point scale
90-100	A+	12	67-69	C+	6
85-89	A	11	63-66	C	5
80-84	A-	10	60-62	C-	4
77-79	B+	9	57-59	D+	3
73-76	B	8	53-56	D	2
70-72	B-	7	50-52	D-	1

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by an instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Carleton E-mail Accounts

All email communication to students from the Department of Political Science will be via official Carleton University e-mail accounts and/or Brightspace. As important course and university information is distributed this way, it is the student's responsibility to monitor their Carleton University email accounts and Brightspace.

Carleton Political Science Society

The Carleton Political Science Society (CPSS) has made its mission to provide a social environment for politically inclined students and faculty. By hosting social events, including Model Parliament, debates, professional development sessions and more, CPSS aims to involve all political science students at Carleton University. Our mandate is to arrange social and academic activities in order to instill a sense of belonging within the Department and the larger University community. Members can benefit through our networking opportunities, academic engagement initiatives and numerous events which aim to complement both academic and social life at Carleton University. To find out more, visit us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/CarletonPoliticalScienceSociety/>.

Official Course Outline

The course outline posted to the Political Science website is the official course outline.