Course Information

Course Description

Social media networks, crowdsourcing, and cell phone applications all allow us to see and understand cities and our role within them using a new lens. This workshop class will investigate the use of social media and digital technologies for planning and advocacy by working with planning and advocacy organizations to develop, implement, and evaluate prototype digital tools. Students will use the development of their digital tools as a way to investigate how new media technologies can be used for planning.

This edition of Crowd Sourced City focuses on equity in street names in cities. We will be working with organizations to audit specific cities for gender and race equity. This will include developing strategies for automating gender audits, crowdsourcing gender, race & etymology of place names, and using equity audits to advocate for name changes to the city’s symbolic infrastructure. Partners include the Boston Public Library, Geochicas (a feminist activist group in Latin America) and a city government who is interested in doing an audit of their city’s ties to slavery.

Course Learning Objectives

- Students will reflect on how the past is designed (i.e. design is not only about the future)
- Students will discuss how unequal histories manifest or are silenced in the symbolic infrastructure of the city (specifically, commemorative names of streets and public places)
Students will develop technical skills in spatial analysis, gender detection libraries, data visualization, and downloading information with crowdsourced knowledge archives (e.g. Wikidata, OpenStreetMaps)

Students will apply their technical skills and their learnings about power in the landscape to a civic tech group project in collaboration with an external partner organization.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

We begin by acknowledging the history of colonization of the land on which we gather today and all days, through violence and genocide against the Indigenous peoples connected to it. I wish to acknowledge, too, that my own presence, and my words here, are shaped by my perspective as a white settler.

This land is the unceded, traditional territory of the Massachusett, Nipmuc, Pequot, and Wampanoag, and we recognize that the state of Massachusetts is still home to many Native American peoples. As we continue today and all days, I invite us to consider the ways in which these foundations may shape our structures, and to reflect on how to carry this awareness into our work together.

(Credit to Hannah Winkler of MIT Libraries and the Indigenous Peoples Advocacy Committee for this acknowledgement, which has been modified slightly for the class.)

Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Graded</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four (4) reading responses</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Pass/Fail</td>
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<tr>
<td>There are 5 total assigned but you can opt-out of one. Graduate students have more reading than undergrads.</td>
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| Case Study presentation | 10% | Group | Graded |
| In-class mini-project | 10% | Group | Pass/Fail |

| Final project | 50% | Group | Graded |
| ● Content/Idea - ⅓ | | | |
| ● Form/Implementation - ⅓ | | | |
| ● Documentation/Hand-off - ⅓ | | | |


Special Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you need disability-related accommodations, I encourage you to meet with me early in the semester. If you have not yet been approved for accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services at sds-all@mit.edu.

I look forward to working with you to assist you with your approved accommodations.

Student Mental Health

As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may impact your ability to attend class, concentrate, complete work, take an exam, or participate in daily activities.

I am happy to help you navigate these challenges in relation to your classwork. For more resources:

Undergraduates: Please discuss this with Student Support Services (S³). You may consult with Student Support Services in 5-104 or at 617-253-4861.

Graduate Students: Please reach out to the deans for personal support in the Office of Graduate Education.

Diversity & Inclusion

MIT values an inclusive environment. I hope to foster a sense of community in this classroom and consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect. I welcome individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class. If this standard is not being upheld, please come speak with me.

Help with Writing

The MIT Writing and Communication Center offers free one-on-one professional advice from communication experts. The WCC is staffed completely by MIT lecturers. All have advanced degrees. All are experienced college classroom teachers of communication. All are published scholars and writers. WCC lecturers have a combined 130 years’ worth of teaching here at MIT (ranging from 1 to 26 years).

We work with undergraduates, graduate students, post-docs, faculty, and staff. The WCC helps everyone strategize about all types of academic and professional writing as well as oral presentations and slide design.

No matter what department or discipline you are in, the WCC helps you think your way more
deeply into your topic, and helps you see new implications in your data, research, and ideas. The WCC also helps with non-native speaker issues, from writing and grammar to pronunciation and conversation practice. To make an appointment, go to https://mit.mywconline.com and register with our online scheduler. The WCC is at E18-233, 50 Ames Street.

Technology Policy

Students may use laptops and tablets to review readings during class discussions and do our workshops. If you are Facebooking or engaging in other distractions I will ask you to close your computer. I will ask you to put it away your cell phone if you are texting or talking on it in class. If there is an urgent matter that needs to be addressed using your phone (e.g. medical or family issue) please step outside of the room to address it.

Calendar

Mon 2/3 - Hello!

Introduction & syllabus. Present about the City Formerly Known as Cambridge. Introduce our problem space:

How do we develop (automated, crowdsourced, &/or manual) ways of auditing commemorative place names for gender and race equity in specific cities?

Wed 2/5 - Introducing commemorative place names and our work together

Read:
- The Significance of Commemorative Street Names by Maoz Azaryahu (from Critical Toponymies book, pp. 53-70)
- Designing the Past by Alessandro Soro, Jennyfer Lawrence Taylor, Margot Brereton
- Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (from Decolonizing Methodologies, Chapter 1, pp. 20-43). Pay special attention to the received ideas about history that some of us inherit from a Western knowledge tradition pp. 30-34.

Grad students additionally read:
Mon 2/10 - Whose history? With Karilyn Crockett

Whose history? Official histories and counter-archives, counter data, counter cartography. 10AM - Guest lecture by Karilyn Crockett.

Due by Sunday 12pm: Reading response #1: Using the readings from 2/5 and 2/10, describe how power is at play in the names in your hometown/geography. 500-1000 words. SUBMIT ON STELLAR (If you can’t submit on Stellar for any reason, please just email to dignazio@mit.edu)

Read:
- People Before Highways, Chapter 3 by Karilyn Crockett
- Making the Coming Home Map by Margaret Pearce

Grad students additionally read:
- Memorials and Monuments by Derek H Alderman, Jordan P Brasher, Owen J Dwyer, III
- Commentary by Eve Tuck on Indigenous research and Decolonizing Methodologies 15 years later

Wed 2/12 - Kickstart mini-project: Walking & photographing activity

Observing commemorative names in our very local landscape. Who are MIT buildings named for? Streets around MIT? How do names "work" / form on buildings/streets/etc. Each group gets a geographic area of campus to observe. Return & discuss what aspects of commemorative names we want to map (e.g. gender, possibly race, ties to slavery?, connection to colonialism?, connection to fossil fuels?, Indigenous presence?, corporate ties?). Begin using open knowledge repositories to look up information about the people named - Wikidata, Wikimedia, etc.

Browse:
- Our unverified database of Cambridge name etymologies, with gender inferred
- The MIT Black History Project
- AMITA's women's oral history project
- Timeline of women at MIT
- Wikipedia's Gender Gap Dashboard

Mon 2/17 - No Class - Presidents' Day

Tues 2/18 - Monday Schedule - How do we take gender / race / ethnicity / colonialism as objects of study and action?

Due Monday 2/17 at 3pm: Reading response 2: Reflect on this question: "How are race and gender very real and socially constructed? How do the authors of this week’s readings grapple
with this question?" (500 words or less)

Read:
- The Combahee River Collective Statement
- Data Feminism, Chapters 1, 2 and 4 by D'Ignazio & Klein (pp. 21-73 and pp. 97-137)

Grad students additionally read:
- Naming as Norming: “Race,” Gender and the Identity Politics of Naming Places in Aotearoa/New Zealand by Lawrence D. Berg and Robin A. Kearns

Begin our own crowdsourcing exercise to prepare the data for tomorrow’s workshop.

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**Wed 2/19 Introducing crowdsourcing & GIS**

9:30-10am: Reflect on crowdsourcing experiment / data in light of our readings

10am - 11am: Introduction to GIS & spatial analysis with QGIS. Good for folks who have never used GIS or QGIS or who want to get a head start working with our dataset of Cambridge place names & gender data. We'll work on creating a map of Cambridge with streets colored according to the gender of the person commemorated.

Read:
- Ghost Work: How to Stop Silicon Valley from Building a New Global Underclass. Introduction & Chapter 1

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**Mon 2/24 - Finish mini-project**

**Due: In-class mini project**

9:30 - 10am: Present mini-project ideas

10AM Partner Presentation #1: Geochicas - Jessica Sena and Selene Yang

Read/Browse:
- Las Calles de las Mujeres
- TBD

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**Wed 2/26 - Case Study Presentations**

**Due: Commemorative Names Case Study Presentation**

Groups of 2-3 people each present a 10-minute presentation talk about a toponymic auditing project. Projects can be either auditing what exists (e.g. Osez le Féminisme/Paris) OR presenting an alternate history (e.g. Coming Home map/Canada) OR mounting a campaign to change what exists (e.g. Dudley Square > Nubian Square). Choose from the list of approved
projects or clear a different one with Catherine.

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**Mon 3/2 - Class presentations from partners**

9:30am - Partner Presentation: Cambridge Historical Commission

Read/Browse:
- TBD

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**Wed 3/4 - Class presentations from partners II + Round robin - brainstorming around the three partners.**

Partner Presentation: [Garrett Dash Nelson](#), Curator of Maps and Director of Geographic Scholarship at the Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library

45 mins brainstorming. Outcome: decide project groups.

Read/Browse:
- TBD

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**Mon 3/9 - Discussion: Group orientation and preliminary brainstorming**

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**Wed 3/11 - Tech: GIS Level II Workshop**

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**Mon 3/16 - Discussion: The Ethics of Gender Detection; Guest Morgan Klaus Scheuerman**

**Due by Sunday 3pm:** Reading Response #3

Beginning of class - 30 mins for group work and check-in.

Read:
- [The Misgendering Machines: Trans/HCI Implications of Automatic Gender Recognition](#) by Os Keyes
**Wed 3/18 - Tech: Gender detection workshop**

We will be working with libraries that do gender detection from names/text.

Read/Do:
- (optional, if you want to get a sense of how gender is typically treated as binary and essentialist, i.e. the WRONG way to do it) – Follow this tutorial to make an Age/Gender detector in python

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**3/23 - 3/28 - No Class - Spring Break**

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**Mon 3/30 - Group project work**

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**Wed 4/1 - Discussion: Crowdsourced labor & mapping**

**Due by Tuesday 3pm:** Reading Response #4

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**Wed 4/8 - Group project work - Midstream reviews - project partner check-ins**

Due by the end of class: Everyone should plan on sending their partners a midstream update with mock-ups / sketches for feedback.
Mon 4/13 - Discussion: Feminist data visualization

Due by Sunday 3pm: Reading Response #5

Project groups will have 30 mins for group work and checking in

Read:

- "On Rational, Scientific, Objective Viewpoints from Mythical, Imaginary, Impossible Standpoints", Chapter 3 in Data Feminism by D'Ignazio & Klein

Wed 4/15 - Tech: Data visualization & web maps

Mon 4/20 - No Class - Patriot's Day

Wed 4/22 - Work in groups on project

Mon 4/27 - Work in groups on project

Wed 4/29 - Work in groups on project

Mon 5/4 - Final reviews - 2 groups go

9:30AM: Cambridge Historical Commission in attendance for reviews
10:15AM: Geochicas in attendance for reviews

Wed 5/6 - Final reviews - 2 groups go

9:30AM: BPL in attendance for review
10:30AM: Time to discuss documentation and final revisions with the group

Mon 5/13 - Project documentation, archiving and handing off data. And party!

Due by midnight: Final project revision, documentation and hand-off
Assignments

Participation

Class participation will be assessed by attendance and participation in class discussions and workshops. If you are not a person who likes speaking up in large groups, don't worry! There will be plenty of opportunities for smaller, peer-to-peer discussions where you can participate.

Four Reading Responses

You will complete four reading responses during the class. Five are assigned but you can choose not to do one of them. The purpose of these is to reflect on our class readings, prepare for discussion, and relate critical concepts and ideas to the projects we are working on.

Guidelines:
- Reading responses should be around 500-1000 words.
- They should make reference all readings that were assigned (undergraduates only have to reference readings assigned to undergraduates)
- You can use first person "I think... I see a connection..."
- Responses can be informal, BUT should still be relatively well-organized, and always be spell-checked and grammar-checked.
- Do use the responses to connect to other literature/concepts/articles from outside the class that you are thinking about.
- Do use the responses to challenge the authors and raise critical questions that we should discuss in class.

In-class Mini Project (group)

Case Study Presentation (group)

Case studies should take the form of a 10-minutes slide presentation and cover:
- **Who was involved?** Who are/were the stakeholders and what were their motivations for working on the project?
- **What happened?**
  - For example, if it was a real-life renaming, how did it go? How long did it take? How contentious was it?
  - If it was an audit, how did it work? How comprehensive was it? How are people using the results?
  - If it's a speculative project, what alternate reality does it propose? How do its artifacts get circulated in the world and to whom?
- **Images, videos and multimedia** documentation of the project
- **Your analysis** - Using some of the readings so far, what is your analysis of and
reflections on this project? How are forces of power (racism, sexism, colonialism) being challenged or reinforced?

List of approved projects for case studies. I encourage you to choose case studies not on the list as well, just make sure to clear them with me.

Racism & Slave Ownership in the U.S.
- (class partner) The Legacy of Slaveowners lives on in Cambridge Streets - describes Councillor Simmons’ motivations for auditing the commemorative street names in Cambridge
- The local campaign to rename Dudley Square to Nubian Square and its outcome. How did the campaign come about? Who were coalition members?
- Whose Heritage? A map, database and report by the Southern Poverty Law Center on public symbols of the confederacy.
- A campaign by the advocacy group Color of Change to rename Calhoun St (from a slaveowner) in Charleston, South Carolina. How did the campaign come about? Was it successful? Who were stakeholders?

Gender Equity
- (class partner) Geochicas' Calles de las Mujeres project to highlight streets named for women across Latin America and Spain
- SF Honors Transgender History with Street Renaming - How did this renaming come about?
- Toponomastica femminile in Rome led by Professor Maria Pia Ercolini
- An interactive map depicting the gender breakdown of names in seven cities by MapBox developer Aruna Sankaranarayanan and her team
- City of Women map of New York City by Rebecca Solnit & Joshua Jelly-Schapiro. See Solnit’s short essay that accompanies the map. Bonus points for bringing a physical copy of the map to class.
- Research paper about gender equality in names in the Spanish city of Santiago de Compostela

Indigenous Recuperation
- Coming Home to Indigenous Place Names A map by Margaret Pearce that depicts only Indigenous names on the territory conventionally called “Canada”
- The Ogimaa Mikana project to restore Anishinaabemowin place-names to the streets, avenues, roads, paths, and trails of Gichi Kiiwenging (Toronto). See also: 1,2,3

Places Named for Martin Luther King, Jr. in the U.S.
- The Beloved Streets of America effort, founded by Melvin White, to systematically uplift all streets named for Martin Luther King, Jr. in the US
- Derek Alderman's research on all streets named for MLK, Jr., in the US. especially in light of the recent Kansas City controversy to remove MLK, Jr.’s name from a street. This article is a good starting place to exploring the issues.

Post-communism Renamings
- Change Reality! Renaming the Streets of Zagreb by art collective REINIGUNGSGESELLSCHAFT
General - audits of names or participatory re-thinking of names

- Interactive History of San Francisco Place Names by Noah Veltman
- The participatory renaming Urban Storylines project in Perth, Australia with German artists REINIGUNGSGESELLSCHAFT
- The City Formerly Known as Cambridge by the Institute for Infinitely Small Things

Geographic focus -

- NYC naming streets after hip-hop artists
- US-Iraq: U.S. Troops rename Baghdad streets during occupation
- San Francisco-Facebook: Zuckerberg donates to SF General and renames hospital
- Singapore: Naming strategies in Singapore
- Turkey: Naming strategies in Turkey
- Hungary-Romania: Politics of Street Names
- South Africa:
  - A toponymic investigation of South African gated communities
  - Street name-changes, abjection and private toponymy in Potchefstroom, S.A.

**Final project (group)**

a. Content/Idea - ⅓  
b. Form/Implementation - ⅓  
c. Documentation/Hand-off - ⅓