

Ephemeral Cities: Virtual Explorations in Changing Landscapes and Neighborhoods

Area: Digital Media Studies, Game Studies

Assignment Type: Group Multimedia Project

Lesson Summary: Drawing on urban planning research, students examine one area in one city within the *Ephemeral Cities* project. This project has four parts: a writing assignment where students write analytically about the area and information presented; a proposal assignment where students detail their proposed project goals and requirements; a paper prototyping component where students build their projects on paper to test their ideas; and the project creation component where students actually build and implement their projects.

Analytical Writing Instructions

Drawing on urban planning materials, like Kevin Lynch's *Image of the City* and Jane Jacobs' *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, as well as studies of interface design, like Donald Norman's *The Design of Everyday Things*, examine one area in one city within the *Ephemeral Cities* project. For instance, you could examine either the University of Florida area in Gainesville in 1903 or the Ybor City area in Tampa in 1903. You will first write a summary of the information for that area during that time period and during the present day. This will be used as background for planning your larger project. The larger project can take one of several forms, but all projects must create some digital materials for the current area that could be used for one of the following:

- Promote tourism to that area.
- Act as a virtual museum for that area.
- Present a particular argument (about urban planning and the need for neighborhoods, planned industry; about unfair tax distribution to particular areas; argue for the revitalization of an area through civic art projects; or many other possibilities—remember that the argument must relate intrinsically to the area and its history).
- Remake the area into a playable space with an Alternative Reality Game that explains the history of the area, promotes something in the area (tourism, local arts...), or provides people with a new way of looking at the area.

The project should use historical files from the *Ephemeral Cities* collection, as well as materials from other state archives (PALMM, Florida Memory Project, local government files).

Think about how your analysis could lend itself to a particular project. Your analysis should be at least 2000 words, written as a narrative about the area and it should contain citation information, including references to the materials.

Proposal Instructions

Before beginning this project, you will need to submit a proposal and have it approved. After submitting your analysis and receiving the graded and commented assignment back, you will write the project proposal. The proposal must include a detailed explanation of the scope of your project:

- What area are you working with? Describe it for each time period sampled and the present day. (This will be the first writing assignment).
- Based on your area, what is your project? The description should be interesting and detailed. It should also be meaningful for this particular area. Everything begins with the area you've chosen, so your project should make sense for that area. A tourism style

project in an industrial area would generally be a poor choice because it is not based on what the area affords.

- What are you trying to do (alternative/augmented reality game or ARG, virtual museum, tourism, argument, something else)?
- Why will people want to interact with your project (cool technology, visuals, interesting concept, educational reasons, interest in local community)? Make sure your proposal description speaks to your audience.
- What technologies will you use (Google Earth/Maps/Sketchup, standard website, audio, video, Microsoft Maps, what else)?
- What historical materials will you include? List all of them and explain any technologies needed to manipulate them.

The best proposals will be for feasible projects and will connect to existing needs, so remember to check tourist board, historical societies, and government websites to help connect the project to existing projects and needs. Make sure to include a descriptive title. The proposal should be typed and should be online with the area analysis, on a website or webpage that will be used to promote your project. The proposal should be at least 2500 words and should detail what you intend to do, why, and how. The more thorough this proposal, the easier it will be to construct your paper prototype. Investing time here will save a great deal more time and effort later.

Like the Sanborn Insurance maps, where can you find information about the neighborhood now? Many resources exist, but they don't yet overlap—Google Maps includes current businesses and housing locations, real estate sites may describe the area as it is now or has been, county and city websites will have historical information, information on schools, development plans, and more related to that area.

In planning your project, be prepared to explain why the area changed between the two time periods in the maps? How did the local environment—hurricanes, fires, building materials, sinkholes, local wildlife—affect building and city development over time?

Paper Prototype Instructions

After your proposal is approved and you have the comments on the proposal, you must then create a paper prototype of your project. The paper prototype will test your idea before the project is too far along and becomes too difficult to change.

Prototyping resources:

- <http://alistapart.com/articles/paperprototyping>
- <http://www.paperprototyping.com/>
- <http://www.usabilitynet.org/tools/prototyping.htm>

Project Instructions

After completing the paper prototypes, the entire class will review all of the prototypes, proposals, and narratives. The class will then select the top 10% of the projects for implementation. The criteria for selection will be gauged in relation to the historical materials, feasibility, and creativity. While not all projects will be implemented, all of the steps will lead into projects that could be created later on and the experience of going through all of the steps will be invaluable in actual implementing the projects.

Because the final projects are based on the prior work, the rules/rubric for the final project will be added when the projects for implementation are chosen.