Genealogy: Basic Genealogy – DNA – AI

Instructor: John Harrison

Location: Udvar-Hazy Business Building (UH 105), Computer Lab

Dates: September 11–November 6, 2025 (Fall Break-no class October 9)

Time: Thursdays, 5:30–7:00 p.m. Mountain Time (local St. George time)

Office Hours: Tuesday, 1-3p.m. by appointment. john@goharrison.net or Text 970-778-5281

1. Course Description

An introduction to family history research using traditional genealogy, DNA evidence, and artificial-intelligence tools. Students will learn to gather, evaluate, and organize genealogical information—and how modern technology can uncover family connections and strengthen proof arguments.

2. Course Objectives

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

- Understand basic genealogy principles and standards (BCG GPS; EE/Chicago citation habits).
- Use FamilySearch.org and related tools effectively.
- Apply DNA results to genealogical research.
- Evaluate genealogical sources for accuracy and reliability (original/derivative/authored; primary/secondary/undetermined; direct/indirect/negative).
- Use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) responsibly to support genealogical work.

3. Required Accounts & Tools

- Free account at **FamilySearch.org** (install the **FamilySearch** mobile app for in-class activities).
- Free account at **ChatGPT** (chatgpt.com).
- Laptop/tablet/phone for lab work.

4. Course Schedule (Outline)

Week 1 – Sep 11: Welcome & Getting Started

- Course overview; expectations and resources.
- The research process—4 steps (objective → search → analyze/correlate → conclude/report).
- In-class activity: FamilySearch **Relatives Around Me** at UT.

Week 2 – Sep 18: The Gathering–Records, Evidence & Evaluation

- Vital records, census, probate, land, and other core record sets.
- Evidence analysis: original/derivative/authored; primary/secondary/undetermined; direct/indirect/negative.
- Practical exercises.

Week 3 – Sep 25: Research Planning & Workflows

- Objectives, hypotheses, and research questions.
- Research logs, locality guides, and timelines.
- Tools for analysis and correlation (hands-on lab).

Week 4 – Oct 2: DNA Basics for Genealogists

- Autosomal, Y-DNA, and mtDNA—what each can (and cannot) tell you.
- Overview of the **Shared cM Project** and relationship ranges.
- Short case study.

Week 5 – Oct 16: DNA in Action

- Using DNA matches for family discovery.
- Shared matches, triangulation, clustering strategies; reading cM with caution.
- Lab activity (hands-on in the computer lab).

Week 6 – Oct 23: Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Genealogy

- AI assistance (ChatGPT, transcription, translation, planning aids).
- Ethical use, transparency, and professional standards for AI in genealogy.
- Practice session.

Week 7 – Oct 30: Storytelling with Genealogy

- Writing family history sketches; visual aids, charts, and narrative choices.
- AI tools for drafting, revision, and graphics (with disclosure guidance).

Week 8 – Nov 6: Pulling It All Together

- Drafting your next research plan; sharing your work with family & community.
- Course reflections: show-and-tell.

5. Assignments / Activities

- Weekly exercises (records searches, DNA charts, logs).
- In-class participation (lab practice, discussions).
- **Final project (choose one):**
    1. A 1–2 page **mini research plan** with objective, brief background, prioritized source list, and next steps; or
    2. A 1–2 page **family sketch** supported by at least three sources.

    Formatting: Use EE/Chicago-style source citations; include at least one example of negative or indirect evidence (when applicable). Attach an image or link to a key source (if permitted).

6. Evaluation (non-credit guidance)

- Participation & preparation

- Weekly exercises
- Final project (meets stated criteria)
- *This is an ICL course; evaluation is for feedback and progress tracking.*

7. Course Policies

- **Attendance & participation:** Expected each week (lab-friendly class).
- **Respectful collaboration:** Encourage peers; be constructive.
- **Technology:** Laptops/tablets/phones welcome in lab.
- **DNA privacy & ethics:** Do not share living persons' sensitive data without consent.
- **Citation & documentation:** Follow Evidence Explained/Chicago conventions; maintain brief research notes for exercises.
- **AI use & disclosure:** AI is encouraged for brainstorming, drafting, and formatting. Clearly disclose any substantive AI assistance in your work per our AI disclosure standard (one-line note is sufficient).

8. Resources (selected)

- *Research Like a Pro: A Genealogist's Guide*, by Diana Elder and Nicole Dyer (2018).
- Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, 4th ed. (2024).
- Elizabeth Shown Mills, *Your Stripped-Bare Guide to Citing & Using History Sources* (2025).
- Diana Elder, Nicole Dyer, and Robin Wirthlin, *Research Like a Pro with DNA* (2021).
- Diana Elder and Nicole Dyer, *Research Like a Pro with AI* (2025), Family Locket.
- *The Family History AI Show* podcast (Mark Thompson and Steve Little), 2024–present.
- Your DNA Guide — The Academy (Diahan Southard): yourdnaguide.com/theacademy
- FamilySearch Wiki & Help Center.
- Shared cM Project (Blaine Bettinger & **Jonny Perl**), DNA Painter Shared cM Tool.