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Implementation of Online Courses

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Abstract (for dissemination)	The deliverable details the creation, launching and conducting of the guided Online Course “‘It Must All be Recorded Without a Single Fact Left Out’. The Holocaust through the Perspective of Primary Sources”. A special focus is on the profiles of the participants and their feedback on the course.
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1 Introduction

The central goal of EHRI's WP4 "Training and Education" has been the encouragement of scholars of diverse backgrounds – historians, archivists, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and others – to engage in Holocaust research and familiarize themselves with new methodological approaches to the topic. The approach to this goal has been two-folded: On the one hand, we conducted ten EHRI-Seminars in nine different European cities – as well as in Jerusalem. On the other, we have enlarged our online presence significantly. Already in EHRI 1, Online Course Units were developed, focussing on a variety of Holocaust-related themes. In EHRI 2, a monitored Online Course was created that allows for additional assistance and feedback for the users, poses research questions and evaluates the participants' responses. Yad Vashem, the task leader, was most suitable for this task, not only for the knowledgeability of its research department, but especially for its significant previous experiences with the creation and implementation of Online Courses. This DL details the creation and the launch of the EHRI Online Course "It Must All be Recorded Without a Single Fact Left Out". The Holocaust through the Perspective of Primary Sources". The quotes from participants in the concluding section of the DL underline the need for a continuance and – if possible – enlargement of guided Online Courses available through EHRI.

2 Creating and Launching the Online Course

2.1 General Setup of the Online Course

Although there are a number of Online Courses available which deal with the Holocaust – including the ones established by EHRI – they almost exclusively focus content wise on the history of the Holocaust, while only peripherally touching on questions of methodology and the usage as well as the critical assessment of sources. The Online Course in EHRI 2 offers scholars the possibility to enlarge not only their knowledge on various groups of sources frequently consulted in the study of the Holocaust. It also offers assistance in reading and assessing them – and in this way establishing essential skills for a scholarly approach to any Holocaust related topic.

The course consists of a general introduction on Holocaust sources and their critical use which is followed by five units, each focusing on a specific source-type: 1. The Łódź Ghetto through the Perspective of Photographs, 2. The Warsaw Ghetto through the Lens of Diaries, 3. The Use of German Bureaucratic Sources When Researching the Holocaust, 4. Personal Letters Written Immediately After Liberation, 5. Testimonies of Survivors as Primary Sources. The concluding unit of the course shows as an example how the various sources can be combined to establish a thorough and extensive account of "The Holocaust in Ukraine". As the titles already convey, all texts are rich with examples and case studies to underline the value of the respective source type. Next to the already established usage of pictures, original documents and audio-visual survivor testimonies, the units are intersected with short interviews by acclaimed scholars in the field of Holocaust research. They offer insight into their own research and reflect on the importance – and pitfalls – of the various source types. All units are accompanied by written assignments and members of EHRI are engaged in any question or discussion arising. It is therefore ensured, that the participants find ideal conditions – content wise as well as in respect of the offered infrastructure – to engage in the course. A diploma of participation is issued by EHRI and Yad Vashem at the end of the course.

The online course is yet another example of how the manifold synergetic effects of EHRI play out: Established practice by EHRI members, in close cooperation with other partners in EHRI, is used to create new ways of engaging students and scholars, especially those who

are as of yet not integrated into a well-established research network. This leads in turn to an ever-growing connection, exchange and scholarly enhancement – with EHRI at its core.

2.2 Advertising the Course and choosing participants

The EHRI Online Course “It Must All be Recorded Without a Single Fact Left Out’:The Holocaust through the Perspective of Primary Sources” created by Yad Vashem with the advice and support of other institutions within WP 4 (IfZ, USHMM, NIOD) was finalized in the spring of 2017. Thanks to a coordinated effort, the CfA for the course was already well under way in the last stages of finalizing the course material. The CfA was disseminated via well-established channels in and outside of EHRI, i.e. via the EHRI-Homepage/Facebook/Twitter, the homepages and social media channels of the involved partner institutions, Yad Vashem’s internet page for Online Courses and online services providing an overview on events and opportunities for people working in the humanities (h-net, hsozkult).

Thirteen applications were received for the first call (deadline 10 March 2017). Yad Vashem, the task leading institution, reviewed the applications and – in consultation with the WP – admitted all applicants to the Online Course. Although the envisioned learning groups were initially limited to twelve participants, we agreed to approve up to 14 participants per unit. Upon finishing the first learning group, two more calls were issued, and in both cases, the number of applications tripled, allowing to constitute the remaining five learning units, which started respectively on 4 September 2017 (14 participants), January 2018 (12 participants), April 2018 (13 participants), September 2018 (13 participants) and January 2019 (14 participants). Whenever possible, the participants were given the chance to choose the starting point which fitted their calendars best.

After the starting date of each course, when the introduction is made available to the participants, a new unit is released to them in two-week intervals. The participants then have time to work through the unit’s texts, documents, testimonies and expert interviews. At the end of every unit, questions (ranging in numbers from one up to four) are posed which are to be answered in paragraphs of varying extent. The questions are based on the information conveyed in the respective section and ensure that the participants can comprehend and are able to transfer the newly gained knowledge.

The participants receive feedback on their work from scholars at Yad Vashem who already have considerable expertise in creating and conducting tools for e-learning. They can be reached throughout the duration of the course via private messages or in group chats. Next to evaluating the responses to the unit’s questions, they also provide assistance to any inquiries the participants might have about the content and procedure of the course. In addition, the participants are encouraged to introduce themselves to the rest of the group in chat forums, which were created to encourage and support the exchange between the participants. The colleagues at Yad Vashem guide the course and are the contact persons for every question the participants might have. The possibility to interact with participants and advisers equally proved to be an additional advantage to the course. The participants used the virtual room provided to share their thoughts on discussion points provided by the course moderators, exchange book recommendations as well as discuss research trends and questions.

The course is completed after the participants have turned in and received feedback on their final assignment presented in Unit 6. They receive a certificate of completion confirming their participation in the course.

3 Conducting and taking part in the Online Course

3.1 Profile of Participants

In the call, the profile of participants the course is addressed at is kept quite broad: “This Online Course is aimed at the graduate level (i.e. those holding a BA-degree or higher qualification) and offers a unique opportunity for scholars from a variety of disciplines (historians, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and others interested in the Holocaust) as well as archivists working in fields connected with historical archival research.” This was a deliberate decision, since it was assumed that potentially not only historians would be interested and profit from this course, but everyone who is working with holocaust-related sources.

After completing the six rounds of the course and going through the dozens of applications, it appeared that our presumptions about the diversity of people interested in the course were correct. Taking for example the profile of the participants who took part in the last three rounds of the course, we can see that they hailed from 16 different countries, representing a wide spectrum of backgrounds and interests: Professors as well as teachers, journalists, graduate students, people working in Holocaust and commemoration institutions, memorials and projects, an Officer of the Royal Netherlands Army and a Special Investigator in the US Department of Justice at the Department of Police. Their fields of study and interest included Holocaust studies, Literature, Psychology, Political studies, Jewish Studies, Contemporary History, Philosophy, Law, Music, Photography, Latin-American studies. Overall, during the course we had participants coming from 23 different countries: Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Croatia, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Republic of Ireland, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the UK, Ukraine and the USA. From their motivational letters, the major reasons for applying to the course were to enhance their own research as well as develop and improve their teaching of Holocaust related topics at their respective institutions, to learn more about the subject and especially about working with primary sources.

Part of Yad Vashem's experience in conducting online courses is the knowledge that some people won't be able to finish them, be it for private reasons or other obligations. In the three last rounds, six of the 40 participants didn't finish the course, usually dropping out at early stages or not participating at all. Overall, however, the participants, logging on from around the world, followed the course in a dedicated fashion, turned in their assignments, took part in virtual group discussions and finished the course successfully. Following the success of the course there is an intention to adapt it into a MOOC in EHRI-3.

3.2 Student Participation

The dedication and enthusiasm of the participants was especially apparent in their assignments and virtual group discussions. It was clear that the vast majority of them internalized and absorbed the materials and topics discussed and analyzed, often adding to them from their own personal knowledge. This attitude contributed very much to the success of the course. The following are two examples:

- a) In the fifth lesson of the course dealing with "Personal Letters Written Immediately After Liberation" a letter written by Adele Roet to her family from Auschwitz was presented (this letter appears in the book of Dr. Rob Rozette and Dr. Yael Nidam Oviato). When the course creators searched for the letter in the archives, they found out that the same file (O.75 / 882) also contained a letter written by Adele while she was still imprisoned in Westerbork (the catalogue description reads as follows: "Letter and postcard written by Adelheid Rosette Roet from Westerbork and from Auschwitz in the years 1943-1945"). Since they wanted to illustrate a significant change in the

handwriting of one of the letter writers, both letters were presented in the lesson and were compared. One of the students was very excited about these letters and decided to fully decipher and translate the letter from Westerbork. In his in-depth, independent research, he concluded that the letter from Westerbork was not written by Adele but rather by her sister. Another student who also looked into Adele's family background came to a similar result. Following this amazing work done by the students the course creators from Yad Vashem decided to remove the example from Westerbork from the lesson and leave only the example from Auschwitz to illustrate the handwriting of a survivor a few days after her liberation (and the day before her death). This correction was very much welcomed by the Yad Vashem staff as it allowing them to find out there was a mistake in the cataloguing of their archives enabling the, to correct it.

- b) One of the participants shared her vast knowledge on the deportations from Hungary including a deportation list which added greatly to the discussion: "Another interesting part of the lecture was [sic.] the timetables of the departing trains, it is really a pity that so many sources are missing and sometimes historians can only guess what happened. That is not different in Hungary either, we have some reports from the gendarmerie, who arranged the practical parts of the deportations, but an even more essential source is the list compiled by the head of the train station in Kassa (Kosice, part of Hungary at the time), who wrote down the data of all departing trains passing through (and appr. 90% of them went that way, towards Auschwitz). Thus we know that more than 400 thousand Hungarian Jews were deported within less than 2 months in 137 trains. If you're interested in the list, here is a [link](#) with an English description..."

4 Feedback from participants

Following, please find a selection of user comments sent to the advisors during and after the end of the Online Course:

"I found the lesson very enriching and eye-opening. The structured presentation of the importance of photographs and the methodological aid you presented us in this lesson really helped me in shaping my vision and in improving my analytical skills. Moreover, the bibliography you used really caught my attention and I really want to go into depth in Zelizer, Guerin and Didi-Huberman's books, to name just a few of the authors that I intend to read after this lesson. The videos were helpful and very to the point as well. I enjoyed very much listening to the presentations made by Dr. Uziel and Dr. Löw."

- *Participant from Romania*

"I learned way more than you can tell from my assignments and I appreciate the logical and comprehensive way this course was set up as. [...] Thank you for teaching the most interesting online class I have ever taken."

- *Participant from USA (Arkansas)*

"Thank you. I am learning a lot not only from the content of the lessons but also from all the resources associated with the lessons to aid in my research."

- *Participant from USA (Vermont)*

"...Thank you also for your support, coordination and comments during the course. I really enjoyed the course, found it interesting and enriching. It really made me realize how much I don't know about Holocaust, how complex it is and also how much we should still discover and study about it. Then the forums, I think they have been really useful to share

and compare opinions with people from different places and, I guess, different ages and background..."

- *Participant from Italy*

"... I wanted to write to both of you for thanking you once again for this incredible opportunity you offered me. I hope I will be able to pass some pieces of knowledge I acquired during these months to my future students and to my newborn baby... On their behalf too, thanks again for this enriching experience.

I'm looking forward to participate in other courses and I hope some of them will be again organized by you..."

- *Participant from Italy*

"...Thank You again for the many informations [sic.] and new points of view the course gave, I am already looking forward to reading about new activities and learning possibilities..."

- *Participant from Germany*

"... The whole course and its contents did not feel like work but it was so much fun to learn about the Holocaust from such a variety of sources. My future work will definitely benefit from this course! I would like to praise all the work you... and all the other involved persons put into the conception of the course. The material was very well chosen, concise [sic.], and clear. Also, it was a pleasure to watch all videos (which had the perfect length) of the Holocaust experts and learn so much more about the Holocaust! I hope there will be similar courses in the future - I'd be the first to sign up! ...Thank you again for a wonderful, wonderful course which I will never forget!..."

- *Participant from Germany*

"...I just wanted to tell you, I am enrolled locally in a history course, for which I paid an enormous amount of money, and your course is SO much better than this local one, I can hardly tell you. Your course is so well organized, with useful information, and no confusing parts, there is simply no comparison. I hope to take more YV courses in the future -- it has been FAR more useful than this one I'm taking in Boston (from which I am about to withdraw, actually)... Thanks again!"

- *Participant from USA*

"...I want to thank you again and so much for having given me the opportunity to take part in such a precious, interesting and highly formative course..."

- *Participant from Italy*

"...I just wanted to let you know that I received an 8,5 (out of 10) for my M.A. Holocaust and Genocide Studies thesis at Amsterdam University partly thanks to skills acquired in the online course..."

- *Participant from the Netherlands*

"...Thank you for keeping us posted and what a fascinating variety of offerings, with so much food for thought and such an amazing variety of resources! I had only seen the exhibition spaces at Yad Vashem, this behind the scenes tour of the resources is so impressive..."

- *Participant from USA*

"...I want to let you know that thanks to the course, tomorrow I will present the movie "Who Will Write our History" which will be screened in Barcelona!!!

The course has been extraordinary!!!..."

- *Participant from Spain*

One of the participants, a distinguished lecturer at Hunter College, NY, wrote a review of the course on H-net:

“Interactive EHRI Online Course in Holocaust Studies

A word about this wonderful EHRI Online Course.

I am now completing this course after initially debating whether it might simply repeat information about topics with which I am already acquainted. I couldn't have been more wrong.

I can't tell you how glad I am that I did it. I'll share just a few reasons but, instead of getting too specific, I invite any of you to be in touch with me by email if you have any questions about some of the especially interesting parts of this course on primary sources.

1. Despite being acquainted with the work of many of the scholars who “spoke” to us, we had the opportunity to hear the most recent takes of these scholars on Holocaust related topics who -- not surprisingly -- have evolved in their thinking. Through high-quality video, it provided a chance to “sit down” with so many whose work I have long admired – Yehuda Bauer, Samuel Kassow, Lawrence Langer, Christopher Browning, Jürgen Matthäus, Martin Dean -- and to get to know some other extraordinary scholars whose work I only knew a little about-- Havi Dreifuss, Giles Bennett, Frank Bajohr, Jürgen Matthäus, Joel Zisenwine, Yaacov Borut, Iael Nidam-Orvieto and Robert Rozett.

2. While I was well aware of the many ways the topic is still fruitfully evolving, I'm not sure I fully appreciated some of the directions in which young scholars are taking the field. And why should I have? This field is changing quickly and, while some of the larger, macro conclusions about the events (especially from the perpetrator's perspective) seem fairly well-established, newly appreciated and discovered survivor/victim primary sources are keeping the field incredibly fresh and vital. The course introduced me to some of those.

3. Finally, the fact that I already teach related topics made it possible for me to point out things to graduate students who were also participating, which I found extremely satisfying. i.e. books, monographs, films with which they were not acquainted. Last point: Our guides through the material – scholars and educators at Yad Vashem and EHRI, and others from archives and universities around the world -- could not have been more responsive and indispensable.

It's definitely worth exploring, a wonderful experience. And given how so many of us on this list -- from grad students to experienced academics -- slowly tend to move into our specialize niches, it was a great opportunity to peek inside some of the niches in which others have been doing such fascinating work and see all that we may have obscured by our own specialization.”