



Timeline Creator

Mike Reese, Assistant Director, CER

What this is

The Innovative Instructor is a forum that publishes articles related to teaching excellence at Johns Hopkins

About the CER

The Center for Educational Resources partners with faculty and graduate students to extend instructional impact by connecting innovative teaching strategies and instructional technologies

For information on how to contribute to *The Innovative Instructor* or to access archived articles,

- please visit our website
- www.cer.jhu.edu/ii
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 - (410) 516-7181

Forum categories

Pedagogy Forum

Hopkins professors share successful strategies for teaching excellence

Technology Forum

Information about emerging technologies, who is using them, and why you should know

Best Practice Forum

“How To” workshops on using technologies and applying innovative instructional methods

What is it?

The Timeline Creator software allows instructors, students, and researchers without multimedia development skills to develop an interactive timeline for teaching or presentation purposes. The resulting timeline can be published on the World Wide Web, through BlackBoard or other content management systems, or presented directly from a computer. The interface can display up to six simultaneous timelines to compare and contrast various “events” with descriptive text and media such as digital images, audio, and video.

and how the resources could be improved. One student commented that an art history course should include a timeline that shows the historical context in which art of different eras was created so students could more easily understand the interaction between religious, political, and cultural movements. As the team developed an example, faculty in other disciplines – sociology, political science, history– asked for a timeline when they saw the prototypes. This led the team to develop a timeline creator software instead of a static art history timeline.

Who produced it?

The Center for Educational Resources developed the software through support from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations.

Why was it made?

The idea for the software came from student feedback collected during the evaluation of an introductory art history class taught by Prof. Herb Kessler. The project team developed a number of new resources for the course and conducted focus groups with students to identify how they used them

Why does it matter?

The tool can be used by faculty to easily create a web-based, virtual timeline as a supplementary instructional resource for a class. Faculty can also give the tool to students to use in course projects in which they develop their own timelines to demonstrate complex relationships between historical events sorted by different categories associated with one of the six bands.

The software uses a basic layout to display the events entered, but the author can customize all the colors and text shown on the timeline as shown in figure 1.

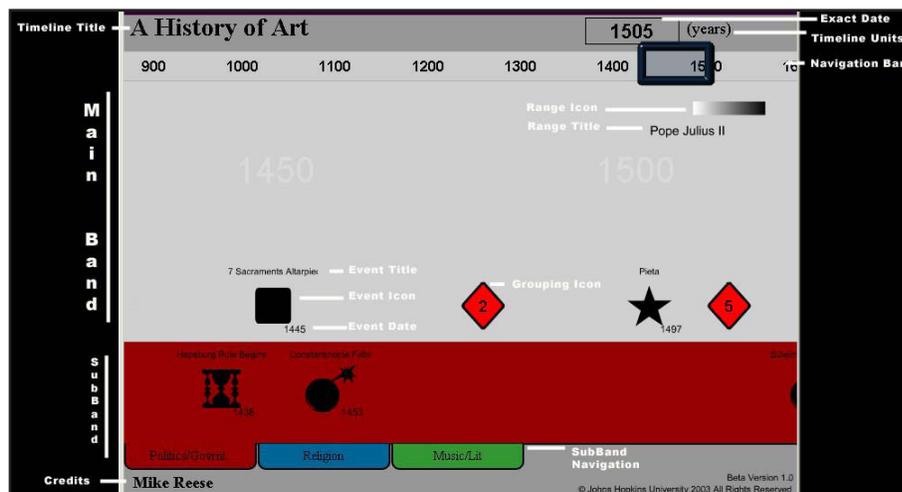


fig. 1 - Main Timeline Interface (elements are labeled in white)

In addition, the tool can be more than a timeline creator because it displays information on a linear scale. Therefore, it can also be used to present information using other units than time. For example, using distance as the unit of measure a faculty could show point-pollution sources along a river with pollutant readings take at regular intervals.

Who's using it?

The software is freely available to the general public at <http://timeline.cer.jhu.edu>. To date, over 20,000 users have downloaded the software.

The first timeline was created for an art history course. Figure 1 shows the general navigation for the art history timeline. Figure 2 shows an example of the detail window which can display more information about the event along with audio, video, or images.

Where is it going?

The CER allows users to modify the source code through an open source license. The only stipulation is that anyone who makes modifications must send those changes back to the CER so improvements and new functionality can be shared with others.

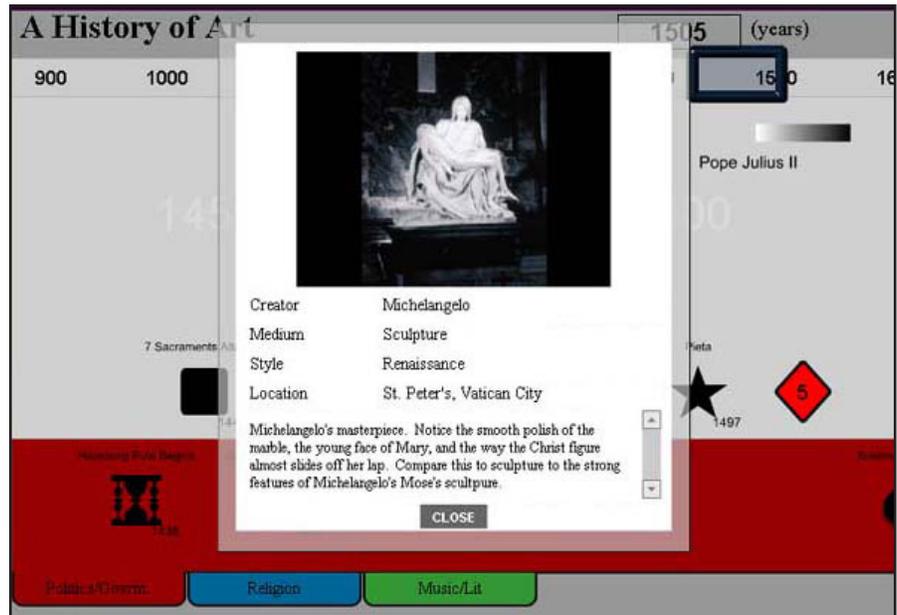


fig. 2 - Event detail example in a History of Art timeline

Other Thoughts

The Timeline Creator won first place in the Fall 2003 Innovations Award from Macromedia in the category of Higher Education Academic Computing.

"We have been using this software for a History of Sport course for three years and can't thank you enough for making it available."

"I have been searching for this type of software and there are few choices in this area, but your software seems to have what we need for our homeschool project. I appreciate the free cost and I think it is a great product."

Additional Resources

- Timeline Creator Download - <http://timeline.cer.jhu.edu/>
- Alternative Timeline Software - MIT'S SMILE web-based timeline tool <http://www.simile-widgets.org/timeline/>

Author's Background

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Mike Reese is the assistant director of the Center for Educational Resources. He acted as the project manager on the redesign of the introductory art history course and oversaw the development of the Timeline Creator Software.