

Course Title

Merging & Separating Identities: Strategies and Tactics to Identify and Solve

Course Description

Merging and separating identities is a critical part of genealogical research and a fundamental challenge in the field. Discerning identities among individuals who share names, locations, and other identifiers is a prevalent challenge for researchers of all levels. Learn to initially identify the situation and then to apply techniques which merge or separate identities, often of same-named individuals. The course focuses on people with the same name in one or more locations. Additionally, research subjects with different names are discussed.

Focusing on a variety of M/S scenarios, sessions will enhance each student's proficiency in the critical areas of organizing, analyzing and solving. This is accomplished through targeted sessions on instruction, examples through case studies, and practice through exercises. Tools and techniques include a variety of technology use including Microsoft Excel, Fillable PDFs, various artificial intelligence platforms, and AirTable.

Designed for intermediate and advanced genealogists, this course offers the opportunity to refine research techniques, to enhance understanding of genealogical complexities, and to solve cases which merge and separate identities.

There is no traditional "syllabus" that is sometimes provided in an institute course. Students will receive support material in a variety of other forms. It is helpful to have an NGS membership for access to its resource library including National Genealogical Society Quarterly and the National Genealogical Society Magazine. Additionally, as a part of the course, a set of records is provided which will be used before and during the course. The majority of the records are on FamilySearch and Ancestry, thus access to these is highly recommended.

Prerequisites

Students of intermediate and advanced genealogical experience and education are encouraged. Exposure to merging and separating identity cases of your own, or clients, is beneficial. A "common data set" is provided ahead of the course which is considered required work before beginning. Students should set aside 10-20 hours to do this.

**Merging & Separating Identities: Advanced Techniques to Organize, Analyze, and Solve
Sessions & Schedule as of 03/18/26**

Session #	Thursday Dates	Time MT	Instructor	Session Name	Session Description
Week 1 – April 30					
	4/24/26			Pre-Course Work Due	Send your pre-course work on the Common Data set to Jan
	4/30/26	9:00-9:30	Jan	Opening	
1	4/30/26	9:30-10:45	Jan	Introduction & Process Map	This session will cover research questions for merging and separating identities. Different types of cases, their records, outcomes will be reviewed. An introduction to identifying and labeling will be reviewed that includes biases, assumptions, hypotheses, and mid-point conclusions.
2	4/30/26	11:15-12:30	Jan	Organization & Common Data Set	We will introduce and discuss the common case study and review how to organize data.
3	4/30/26	12:45-2:00	Jan	Common Data Set Workshop	Methods to collect, document, record, and organize all the records for complex merging and separating cases will be reviewed.
Session #	Thursday Dates	Time MT	Instructor	Session Name	Session Description
Week 2 – May 7					
	5/7/26	9:00-9:30	Jan	Homework Review and Questions	
4	5/7/26	9:30-10:45	Jan	Literature Review	This session will reveal an in-depth literature review with database access instructions.
5	5/7/26	11:15-12:30	Jan	Identity Dossier	This session covers evidence & information mining and how to create and maximize an identity dossier. The dossier review shows how to build it with known information and hypotheses using checklists, mind mapping, and sorting techniques.
6	5/7/26	12:45-2:00	Jan	Identity Dossier Workshop	This workshop allows students to work on either their own case, or the common case provided to the class.

Week 3 – May 14					
	5/14/26	9:00-9:30	Jan	Homework Review and Questions	
7	5/14/26	9:30-10:45	Jan	Timelines	As a tool to help merge and separate identities, timelines are crucial. A variety of tools will be demonstrated so students can choose the one best for their use.
8	5/14/26	11:15-12:30	Kristin	Artificial Intelligence	Techniques to maximize the use of AI will be shared including best practices to organize, sort, and correlate.
9	5/14/26	12:45-2:00	Kristin	AI Workshop	
Week 4 – May 21					
	5/21/26	9:00-9:30	Kristin	Homework Review and Questions	
10	5/21/26	9:30-10:45	Lynn	Case Study	Case study demonstrating techniques to solve difficult cases.
11	5/21/26	11:15-12:30	Kim	Offline Methods	Offline techniques to merge or separate identities are shown. This includes organizing, analyzing, and correlating.
12	5/21/26	12:45-2:00	Kim	Offline Methods Workshop	Students will be guided to work on the common case, or their own case, using the offline methods that are taught.
Week 5 – May 28					
	5/28/26	9:00-9:30	Kim	Homework Review and Questions	
13	5/28/26	11:15-12:30	Jan	FAM & FAN Clubs	Many solutions to difficult merging and separating cases are solved through identification, separation, and thorough tagging of FAN club members. This session provides techniques for students to practice.
14	5/28/26	12:45-2:00	Jan	Macroenvironmental Factors	
15	5/28/26	9:30-10:45	Jan	Locations & Mapping	A review of locations as they relate to merging and separating identities is discussed. This will include jurisdiction changes as well as mapping through place and time.

Week 6 – June 4					
	6/4/26	9:00-9:30	Jan	Homework Review and Questions	
16	6/4/26	9:30-10:45	Patti	DNA	This lecture will explore strategies and tactics for using DNA to both merge and separate identities in genealogical research. You'll consider the challenges while maximizing the strengths of DNA evidence. Whether you're dealing with cases of mistaken or merged identities, or trying to disentangle branches of your family tree, this session will help you overcome common obstacles and leverage DNA effectively.
17	6/4/26	11:15-12:30	Nicole	Mastering Identity Management: Spreadsheet Techniques	Learn powerful methods for resolving same-name individuals using spreadsheet analysis. This session explores essential data points to collect, systematic approaches to analysis, and correlation techniques that reveal hidden patterns. Discover why spreadsheet organization is indispensable when untangling complex identity puzzles.
18	6/4/26	12:45-2:00	Nicole	Spreadsheets Workshop	
Week 7 – June 11					
	6/11/26	9:00-9:30	Jan	Homework Review and Questions	
19	6/11/26	9:30-10:45	Jan	Legal Issues, Assumptions, & Negative Evidence	Most cases of merging or separating identities involve negative findings which may become negative evidence. We will discuss how to identify it, seek it out, and strengthen the case.
20	6/11/26	11:15-1:15 Longer session as needed	Jan	Case Study Structuring & Wrap-Up	Additional complexity is added when structuring a case study that includes merging or separating identities. Often, multiple candidates and the proof that includes, or excludes, them is lengthy. This session provides options for best structuring including the sequence of introducing the candidates and how to eliminate them, if applicable.