

Digital Humanities

English Bldg 339

Ted Underwood

office hrs: Monday 2-3

Although “digital humanities” has been around for more than fifteen years, the phrase is still controversial. For some observers, this is the name of a coherent academic field, with its own methods, conferences, and journals. Others see it as an umbrella term covering an assortment of projects with basically distinct goals. Both groups could be right: it’s complicated.

This course will explore new ideas and practices associated with “DH” without trying to reach a consensus about the meaning of the term. Contested terms are normal in the humanities; in fact, they may suggest that a field is lively and expanding. But controversies about the coherence of the digital humanities should warn us to expect an acute tension between breadth and depth here. This course will aim for breadth, seeking to prepare students for jobs in libraries, museums, and foundations, where they may need to engage digital projects across a wide range of fields, or discuss the effects of technology generally. We’ll trace contributions from the information sciences and social sciences, as well as the humanities.

If you’re interested in advancing a single discipline, you are likely to need a more focused kind of preparation — and the nature of that preparation could depend entirely on the discipline. If you want to use digital libraries to understand literary history, for instance, you often need some familiarity with linguistics. If you’re interested in public-facing digital history projects, you may need to study text encoding and web design. I can’t pretend to cover (or even introduce) all of those topics in a single semester. At most, this course will provide a taste of a few possibilities, and a sense of where you might go to learn more.

Because DH is a sprawling and evolving thing, this course also spends very little time teaching specific software packages or tools. Over the long haul, I recommend learning to program, so you can build your own tools. But programming is too large a subject to squeeze into the margins of this course. Instead I’ll try to support you as you pick up whatever skills you need for a specific project you have chosen. We’ll also reflect collectively on the meta-skills involved in navigating a rapidly changing technical landscape, where you’re always having to solve problems you were never taught to solve.

Assignments.

Participation is an important part of the course. I'll ask everyone to plan to kickstart discussion on two days, by choosing a particular question to focus our attention, and posting it to the discussion forum for that day by the Sunday before class. There will also be a take-home final exam, and two short homework assignments. But the centerpiece of your coursework will be a semester project. You have a choice between two paths:

- 1) Write a review essay that discusses a single existing digital humanities project. A "project," here, could be a digital archive, a tool, or simply an essay that used computational methods or digital representation as part of its argument. In assessing the project, describe its audience and use, its technical choices, its funding (if any), and its strategies for sustaining or preserving the results of research. To prepare for the review, you'll probably want to interview the creator(s) of the project, and also examine similar work.
- 2) Alternatively, you could attempt a digital humanities project yourself. This option is listed second because I expect #1 will work better for most people. As I've mentioned above, this course aims for breadth: it tries to survey the whole phenomenon of digital humanities, rather than preparing you to *do* a particular kind of research (say, distant reading or digital history). But if you are coming to the course with other preparation and want to give a specific project a try, you can.

Your project can be individual or collaborative. That choice depends entirely on your own preferences. It is sometimes easier to work alone, but if you're tackling a big project that requires a range of different talents (which could easily happen with option #2 above), you may want to team up. A collaborative project should be accompanied by a brief statement describing the division of labor involved; it's a good idea to discuss this explicitly in advance.

The grade will be based 25% on participation, 25% on the exam, 10% on homework, and 40% on the semester project.

Acknowledgments.

In planning this syllabus, I consulted DH syllabi by Jana Diesner, Alan Liu, Amardeep Singh, Tanya Clement, Andrew Goldstone, Shannon Mattern, and Benjamin Schmidt. I also consulted Harriett Green, whose advice largely shaped

the reading on several days. The “Learn a New Technology” assignment was shamelessly stolen from Michael Twidale; the design of the semester project was strongly influenced by John Unsworth.

Schedule

Aug 23. A helicopter tour of the digital humanities.

Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, “What is Digital Humanities, and What is it Doing in English Departments?” *ADE Bulletin* 2010.

Melissa Terras, “Quantifying Digital Humanities” (2012)

Lauren F. Klein and Matthew K. Gold, “The Expanded Field,” *Debates in Digital Humanities* 2016.

[ADHO conference program](#) (just skim a few pages of topics).

Miriam Posner, “How Did They Make That?” (2013).

Aug 30. Doing things with digital texts (mostly one at a time).

Susan Schreibman, “Digital Scholarly Editing,” *Literary Studies in the Digital Age*, edited by Kenneth M. Price and Ray Siemens (2013).

[The William Blake Archive](#).

Kate Singer, “Digital Close Reading: TEI for Teaching Poetic Vocabularies,” *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy* (2013).

Marilyn Butler, “Jane Austen’s Word Process” (review of Burrows, *Computation into Criticism*, 1987.)

Mark Olsen, “Signs, Symbols, and Discourses: A New Direction for Computer-Aided Literature Studies,” *Computers and the Humanities* 27 (1993).

In class: introducing AntConc.

Sep 6. Distant reading (mostly without computers).

Many of the things we read this week will not, strictly speaking, be digital at all. But they represent a tradition of large-scale social inquiry that has become an important influence on twenty-first-century digital scholarship.

Anu Mustonen and Lea Pulkkinen, “Television Violence: A Development of a Coding Scheme,” *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 41 (1997).

Janice Radway, from *Reading the Romance* (University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

Franco Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61 (2000).

James English, “Everywhere and Nowhere: the Sociology of Literature after ‘the Sociology of Literature’,” *New Literary History* 41 (2010).

In class: install Python for hands-on exercise.

Sep 13. What can models do in the humanities?

We’ll start by considering “models” broadly as epistemological gambits, and then narrow in on the most controversial innovation of recent decades: quantitative modeling of humanistic evidence. In class, we’ll get a hands-on feel for Breiman’s account of the difference between “data modeling” and “algorithmic modeling.”

Willard McCarty, “[Knowing ... : Modeling in Literary Studies](#),” *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, ed. Susan Schreibman and Ray Siemens (Blackwell, 2008).

D. Sculley and Bradley M. Pasanek, “Meaning and Mining: The Impact of Implicit Assumptions in Data Mining for the Humanities,” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 23.4 (2008).

Leo Breiman, “Statistical Modeling: The Two Cultures,” *Statistical Science* 16 (2001).

In class: hands-on exercise using Jupyter notebooks

Sep 20. Computer science and social theory.

Models need to be guided by theory, and there is very little consensus right now on the relation between computational methods and social theory.

Tanya E. Clement, “[Where is Methodology in Digital Humanities](#),” *Debates in Digital Humanities 2016*, ed. Lauren F. Klein and Matthew K. Gold (University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

Kate Crawford and danah boyd, “[Critical Questions for Big Data: Provocations for a Cultural, Technological, and Scholarly Phenomenon](#),” *Information, Communication, and Society* 15 (2012).

Justin Grimmer, “[We Are All Social Scientists Now](#),” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 48 (2015).

John W. Mohr, Robin Wagner-Pacifici, Ronald L Breiger, “[Toward a Computational Hermeneutics](#),” *Big Data and Society* (2015).

Andrew Abbott, “Things of Boundaries,” *Social Research* 62 (1995).

Sep 27. Distant reading meets machine learning.

The traditions we traced in the last three weeks have recently converged; the machine-learning methods once associated with studies of authorial style are now being used to address larger historical questions.

Allison, et al., “Quantitative Formalism: An Experiment,” Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlets (2011).

Rachel Buurma and Anna Tione Levine, “The Sympathetic Research Imagination,” *Debates in Digital Humanities 2016*, ed. Lauren F. Klein and Matthew K. Gold (2016).

Andrew Piper, “There Will Be Numbers,” *Cultural Analytics* (2016).

Ted Underwood, “The Life Cycles of Genres,” *Cultural Analytics* (2016).

Hoyt Long and Richard Jean So, “Turbulent Flow,” *MLQ* 2016.

Oct 4. Digital history.

Stephen Robertson, “The Differences Between Digital Humanities and Digital History,” *Debates in DH 2016*.

Cameron Blevins, “Digital History’s Perpetual Future Tense,” *Debates in DH 2016*.

Pierazzo, E. “Digital Documentary Editions and the Others.” *Scholarly Editing: The Annual of the Association for Documentary Editing* 35 (2014). <http://www.scholarlyediting.org/2014/essays/essay.pierazzo.html>.

Alpert-Adams, Hannah. “Representing the Long History of Early Modern Printed Objects: The Archaeology of a Book.” *Scholarly Editing: The Annual of the Association for Documentary Editing* 37 (2016). <http://scholarlyediting.org/2016/essays/essay.alpertabrams.html>.

Randolph, John. “SourceLab (An Idea).” *SourceLab (An Idea)*. Accessed February 27, 2016. http://scalar.usc.edu/works/sourcelab_idea/index.

In class: Presentation about SourceLab by John Randolph, History.

Oct 11. LIS in digital humanities / DH in libraries.

Unsworth, “Scholarly Primitives: What Methods do Humanities Researchers Have in Common, and How Might Our Tools Reflect This?” (2000)

Miriam Posner, “Challenges to Doing DH in the Library” (2012).

Trevor Muñoz, “Digital Humanities in the Library Isn’t a Service.”

Chris Sula, "Digital Humanities and Libraries: A Conceptual Model," *Journal of Library Administration* 53 (2013).

Bethany Nowvskie, "Skunks in the Library: A Path to Production for Scholarly R&D," *Journal of Library Administration* 53 (2013).

Jennifer Vinopal and Monica McCormick, "Supporting Digital Scholarship in Research Libraries: Scalability and Sustainability," *Journal of Library Administration* 53 (2013).

Trevor Owens, "Digital Preservation's Place in the Future of the Digital Humanities" (2014).

Oct 18. Digital pedagogy.

Digital media are changing our ideas about teaching, in ways that can create an interesting, unresolved tension with existing disciplinary practices.

Cathy N. Davidson, "Why We Need Digital Literacies," *Choice* (2016).

Anita Say Chan and Harriett Green, "Practicing Collaborative Digital Pedagogy," *EDUCause Review* (October 2014).

Jesse Stommel, "Decoding Digital Pedagogy, Pt 2: Unmapping the Terrain," *Hybrid Pedagogy* (2013).

Jonathan Senchyne, "Knowledge and Metaknowledge: Shifting Disciplinary Borders in Digital Humanities and Library and Information Studies," *Debates in DH 2016*.

Ryan Cordell, "How Not to Teach Digital Humanities," *Debates in DH 2016*.

In class: guest lecture from Harriett Green, Associate Professor and English and Digital Humanities Librarian.

Oct 25. Historicizing digital media.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick, "The Stakes of Disciplinarity" (2010).

Friedrich A. Kittler, Introduction to *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*.

Lev Manovich, "What is New Media?" (chapter 1 from *The Language of New Media*, 2001.)

Matt Kirschenbaum, "Every Contact Leaves a Trace," from *Mechanisms*.

Tara McPherson, "Why Are the Digital Humanities So White?" from *Debates in DH 2012*.

Nov 1. Images and spatial representation.

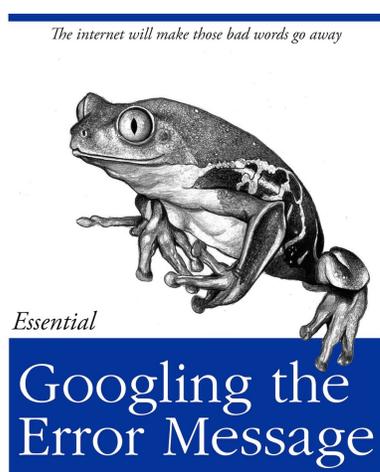
Lev Manovich, "Exploring Urban Social Media" (2015).

- Matthew Wilkens, “The Geographic Imagination of Civil-War Era American Fiction,” *American Literary History* 25 (2013).
- William Kretschmar, “GIS for Language and Literary Study,” *Literary Studies in the Digital Age*, edited by Kenneth M. Price and Ray Siemens (2013).
- Anne Kelly Knowles, “A More Humane Approach to Digital Scholarship” (2016).
The [Historical GIS Research Network](#).
- Eric Kansa, “[Click Here to Save Archaeology](#).”
- Melissa Terras, “[Moving Forward Digital Art History](#)” (2015).

Nov 8. The future(s) of DH.

- Bethany Nowviskie, “Resistance in the Materials” (2013).
- Kim Gallon, “Making a Case for the Black Digital Humanities,” *Debates in DH 2016*.
- Daniel Allington, Sarah Brouillette, and David Golumbia, “Neoliberal Tools,” *Los Angeles Review of Books* 2016.
- Lisa Marie Rhody, “Why I Dig: Feminist Approaches to Text Analysis,” *Debates in DH 2016*.
- Alan Liu, “Against the Cultural Singularity” (2016).

Nov 15. Solving problems no one taught you to solve; aka, meta-skills; aka, googling the error message.



ORLY?

The Practical Developer
@ThePracticalDev

Our main task for this week will be an assignment to “Learn a New Technology,” which I am stealing shamelessly from Michael Twidale. Choose a technology to learn — ideally one that you need for your project. Write a one-page description of the learning process, highlighting various stages of fiddling, googling, giving up, hating everyone, and changing-something-to-see-if-that-helps.

If you read the manual, you can also admit that.

Nov 29. Presentations and discussion of collaboration.

Miriam Posner, [“Here and There: Creating DH Community.”](#)

Anderson, et al., [“Student Labour and Training in Digital Humanities.”](#)

Dec 6. Presentations.