Introduction to Digital Humanities

2014-04-15 00:00:00

Get Help

Fred Gibbs (fwgibbs@umich.edu)

Course Description

This course explores new theoretical and methodological possibilities now available to historians working in the digital age. Combining provocative readings from the digital humanities with introductory tutorials on various digital methods (which build technical proficiency generally), we'll talk about and experiment with powerful new research methodologies that now allow historians to ask and answer fundamentally different kinds of questions and innovatively communicate about them with new media.

With an emphasis on collaborative teaching and learning, we'll explore topics such as digital workflows for accessing or organizing sources, data visualization, digital mapping and geospatial analysis, topic modeling, and network analysis. We'll also examine new models for peer review and academic publishing, develop skills in web typography and design, and create a short video. This course both challenges and complements typical history methods courses, as well as provides strategies for effectively combining qualitative and quantitative research skills. Over the course of the semester, students will design, code, and publish their own website that will showcase their research and digital skills. No technical skills or experience is required for this course, but you will need to have a laptop that you can bring to class.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Develop conversational fluency: understand current debates and speak intelligently with both skeptics and advocates about the history and future of digital scholarship and its relationship to the humanities.

- Appreciate the theoretical possibilities and practical limitations of digital archives and new research methodologies.

- Understand prominent theories and principles of new media and its potential impact on scholarly communication.

- Begin to experiment with new tools, workflows, methods, and techniques for large-scale research questions in the humanities; become able to teach yourself technical skills as needed.

Work Requirements and Grading

- Thorough preparedness and engaged participation in every class meeting (30%)

- Weekly 750-word blog posts that critically engage with both the readings and your experience working through the assignments. This posts not only give you the opportunity to describe your mastery of the readings (as per a more traditional seminar), they also give you a chance to foregound the hard work you're doing, even when you can't get everything to "work". Your blog posts will be evalutated in terms of the quality of their original and thoughtful contribution to the overall course discussion, as well as serious engagement with the technical challenges. (25%)

- A 5-10 minute "video" that showcases the methods, results, and significance of your MA or PhD research (whatever stage you're at). We'll cover tools and techniques for doing this in class (10%)

- In lieu of a final exam or project, over the course of the semester you will create a digital portfolio hosted at GitHub, composed by hand in a text editor with Markdown, HTML and CSS. As outlined in more detail below, your portfolio must show you completing (as best you can) the technical assignments and attempting to apply the techniques in the course to your own research. Some of your portfolio will serve particular course requirements, and you might jettison those componenets when the course ends. Nonetheless, hopefully you'll have a core of a professional website that will continue to benefit your career. (30%)

Your portfolio must include:

- Some kind of landing page or home page that gives some idea of the site's contents

- A page dedicated to explaining---and ideally illustrating---your research, especially its value and significance to a broad audience

- A mostly complete curriculum vitae with appropriate typography

- One webpage for each seminar meeting that hosts your blog post and screen shots explaining your engagement with the assignment. You might also indicate what you might do with considerable more time and expertise as it pertains to your research.

- Critical review of significant digital projects in your field. What exists? How could they be better? What should new projects be doing? If there is not much to report, then write a short manifesto about how the "digital humanities" values and ethos might serve (or not!) your field.

- Perseverance and tolerance for frustration. Digital humanities intentionally engages with new methodological problems and professional challenges raised by technology and new media. While theorizing can be useful, this course emphasizes engagement and experience with the technologies themselves. Seemingly simple (and conceptually straightforward) tasks will occasionally take WAY longer than expected. Pushing through these moments is a big part of success in digital humanities work. (5%)

Suggested Texts

There are no required books the course. However, I highly recommend acquiring a physical copy of *Thinking with Type (2nd ed.)*. Course readings not already online will be shared through the course Zotero library (more on that in class).