Syllabus: Cultures of Data

Class Meeting Times and Location: TR 9:00am-10:15am
Instructor: Nigel Lepianka
Email Address: nlepianka@tamu.edu
Office Location: 451 Liberal Arts and Humanities
Office Hours: TR 2:00pm-3:30pm or by appointment

Catalog Course Description

This course interrogates the assumption that data are, as the term's Latin etymology suggests, a given. Instead, it will ask to what degree are data results of the cultural logic that produced them. Students will read through a range of theories of data production, circulation, and manipulation to help them understand how data navigate and how to navigate data in the twenty-first century. Issues to discuss include: data of vulnerable populations, data accessibility, digital preservation, and data and the humanities. Students should also expect and be open to 1) receiving instruction in XML markdown for text encoding 2) experimenting with the R and SQL programming languages 3) becoming familiar with data wrangling tools such as OpenRefine, and 4) learning about standards of data description commonly found in academic contexts such as MARC and Dublin Core

Required Texts and Resource Material

Readings for the course will be made available on eCampus. Most can also be found freely through library databases and electronic subscriptions. Excerpts from monographs can be found in print on reserve in the library.

Grading and Course Policies

Your grade is based on the average of the assignments listed below. Specific due dates and detailed instructions for all assignments will be provided on eCampus and on the course schedule.

Participation and Attendance	**15%**
Reading Responses	**10%**
Lab Exercises	**20%**
Dataset Proposal	**10%**
Dataset Progress Report	**15%**
Final Project: Dataset	
Technical Documentation	**10%**
Narrative of Development	**10%**
Dataset Presentation	**10%**

Participation and Attendance: It will be expected that you both attend and contribute to course discussions about the assigned materials. Students should consider coming to class with questions or provocations about the reading.

Reading Responses: There will be five (5) writing prompts presented at the beginning of the class on random days where a reading was assigned. These prompts will present an open-ended question for students to respond to that can be used to help them in the course of class discussion.

Lab Exercises: There will be exercises assigned after each of the lab sessions corresponding to the tools and concepts to help students gain further familiarity with the tool. These exercises, in general, will be due the day of the following lab.

Dataset Project: The capstone for the course will be the creation of a dataset and all the necessary documentation in order to help make the dataset both usable and meaningful. This project will be done in assigned groups, but the content, structure, and final presentation of the dataset is in the hands of students. The project will require the groups to submit a proposal of the intended dataset and possible strategies for modeling and presentation, as well as a progress report, and then a final portfolio including all documentation and an analytical narrative about the process of creating a dataset.

Numerical Grade Equivalents

Course grades are calculated on the standard scale:
> A = 100-90
> B = 89-80
> C = 79-70
> D = 69-60
> F = 59 or less

Attendance and Late Turn-In Policy

Attendance: Expectations of the the University Rules are that you complete coursework and submit all assignments in the sequence they are assigned by the deadlines posted on Blackboard. You are also expected to attend class regularly. Any student in excess of **two (2) unexcused absences** is eligible to be reported for excessive absences.

Make-up Policy (excused absences): You must have a University-approved excuse in order to make up a missed course activity or turn in any other assignments without a penalty**.** You are responsible for providing evidence to substantiate "authorized absences." If you must miss time in the course and its activities, it is your responsibility to inform your instructor.

Late Turn-In Policy (unexcused absences): The Late Turn-In Policy for this course follows the guidelines described in the University Student Rules, "Section 7. Attendance" (http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07).

Students Needing Support Service
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information, visit http://disability.tamu.edu.

Title IX and Statement on Limits to Confidentiality
Texas A&M University and the College of Liberal Arts are committed to fostering a learning environment that is safe and productive for all. University policies and federal and state laws provide guidance for achieving such an environment. Although class materials are generally considered confidential pursuant to student record policies and laws, University employees — including instructors — cannot maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues that jeopardize the health and safety of our community. As the instructor, I must report (per Texas A&M System Regulation 08.01.01) the following information to other University offices if you share it with me, even if you do not want the disclosed information to be shared:

• Allegations of sexual assault, sexual discrimination, or sexual harassment when they involve TAMU students, faculty, or staff, or third parties visiting campus.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In many cases, it will be your decision whether or not you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with the Student Counseling Service (https://scs.tamu.edu/).

Students and faculty can report non-emergency behavior that causes them to be concerned at http://tellsomebody.tamu.edu.

Academic Integrity

"An Aggie does not lie, cheat or steal, or tolerate those who do."

Students are expected to be aware of the Aggie Honor Code, the specific rules on plagiarism, and the Honor Council Rules and Procedures pertaining to classroom behavior as explained at http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu.

Diversity Statement

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, perspective, and other background characteristics. I encourage your suggestions about how to improve the value of diversity in this course.

This course meets the following standards for diversity content and instruction in the following way(s):

> 1. Course content that includes readings and other materials that address various categories of social difference (gender, nationality, religion, ethnicity, age, sexuality, political affiliation, socio-economic status, ability, linguistic background, etc.) on the course topic.
> 2. Tying current events and local histories centered on the production of social difference into classroom activities.

University Writing Center

The University Writing Center (UWC), located in 214 Evans Library and 205 West Campus Library, offers one-on-one consultations to writers preparing documents, slides, or oral presentations. UWC consultations are highly recommended but are not required. Help is available for all of the steps of the writing and speechwriting process including assistance with brainstorming ideas, narrowing the topic, creating outlines or drafts, and presenting a speech to an audience. UWC consultants can help you practice your speech with a real audience or develop visual presentation aids like slides and handouts. Consultants can also help you improve your proofreading and editing skills. If you visit the UWC, take a copy of your assignment, a hard copy of your draft or any notes you may have, as well as any material you need help with. To find out more about UWC services or to schedule an appointment, call 458-1455, visit the web page at http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/, or stop by in person.

Assignment Due Dates Overview

Week 4	T	Lab 1. Prompt for the final project dataset to be distributed.
Week 6	T	Lab 2. Exercises for Lab 1 due.
Week 7	R	Lab 3. Exercises for Lab 2 due.
Week 8	T	Dataset Proposals due for presentation in class.
Week 9	R	Lab 4. Exercises for Lab 3 due.
Week 10	R	Lab 5. Exercises for Lab 4 due.
Week 11	R	Exercises for Lab 5 due.
Week 12	T	Dataset Progress Report due for presentation in class.
Week 15	TR	Class presentation of dataset to instructor.

Course Schedule:

WHAT IS DATA?

Week 1
 T Course introduction and syllabus review
 R Defining data + a cursory overview of data models and their purpose

Week 2
 T Johanna Drucker, "Image, Interpretation, and Interface" *Graphesis*
 R Lisa Gitelman and Virginia Jackson, "Introduction" *Raw Data Is An Oxymoron*

Week 3
 T D. F. McKenzie, "Printers of the Mind"
 R Visit to the Special Collections Research Center

DATA AS CONSTRUCTION

Week 4
 T Lab 1: MARC and Dublin Core Metadata Description Standards
  Prompt for the final dataset project will be distributed in class.
 R Mary Poovey, "Figures of Arithmetic, Figures of Speech: The Problem of Induction in the 1830s." *A History of the Modern Fact*

Week 5

       T Geoffrey C. Bowker, "The Empty Archive: Cybernetics and the 1960s" *Memory Practices in the Sciences*

       R Nikki Stevens, "Dataset Failures and Intersectional Data"

Week 6

       T Lab 2: XML Markup
       Exercises for Lab 1 due.

       R Andrea Zeffiro, "Towards a Queer Futurity of Data"

Week 7

       T Jennifer Guiliano and Carolyn Heitman, "Difficult Heritage and the Complexities of Indigenous Data."

       R Lab 3: Modeling Data with SQL
       Exercises for Lab 2 due.

WORKING WITH DATA

Week 8

       T Dataset Proposal due for presentation to class.

       R Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuels, "Deformance and Interpretation."

Week 9

       T Stephen Ramsay, "Potential Readings" *Reading Machines*

       R Lab 4: Data Wrangling with OpenRefine
       Exercises for Lab 3 due.

Week 10

       T Safiya Noble, "Searching for People and Communities" *Algorithms of Oppression*

       R Lab 5: R for Data Analysis
       Exercises for Lab 4 due.

Week 11

       T Ryan Cordell, "Q i-jtb the Raven: Taking Dirty OCR Seriously"

       R Workshop day: students should come to class prepared to work with their groups on their dataset. The instructor is available to troubleshoot.
       Exercises for Lab 5 due

A DATASET OF YOUR OWN

Week 12

       T Dataset Progress Report due for presentation to class.

       R Workshop day

Week 13

       T Workshop day

       R Workshop day

Week 14

    T Workshop day

    R Workshop day

Week 15

    T Class presentation of dataset to instructor.
      All groups will submit their materials on this day regardless of when they present.
    R Class presentation of dataset to instructor.

Week 16

    T Class wrap-up, course evaluations, and instructor AMA