Partner Reflections

We wanted to briefly address how we divided up the work internally for Open Syllabus Explorers. We’ll be touching on 5 main elements: planning, work distribution, troubleshooting, presentation, and a final reflection.

**Craig Lord**

It was a benefit to have Ben as a partner not only through this final project, but throughout the course. Our progress became a microcosm of our larger class community: when we were stuck, we would more often than not bounce ideas off of each other to see if we could overcome things as a team. This was not always effective: he, working with a PC, and I, working with a Mac, inevitably ran into different problems with different solutions. We also made a point of engaging with the wider community on Slack to help others and seek diverse (and often better-educated) opinions. Nonetheless, our project stemmed from a shared interest and ultimately was a productive and enjoyable process.

Planning: Living together with a giant whiteboard on our wall made planning relatively straightforward. We arranged times to meet or would happen to be in the same room grinding through the work and took those opportunities to plot out our way forward, usually on a weekly basis. We knew we wanted to get to the root of what these syllabi could tell us but had different ideas about what we wanted to learn. Ultimately, we decided we could take multiple approaches, doing comparative and canon analyses, a create a greater final product than we could individually.

Work Distribution: At our planning meetings, we set out a list of tasks to be accomplished before our next meeting to take the next steps in our project. Based on our interests and capabilities, we were able to divide these responsibilities fairly organically. Ben took the lead on data harvesting and cleaning, and I would fill in some gaps by doing a bit here and there, like adding the “gender” column to our datasets or mining some extra raw data for academic institutions. I took the lead on the web design aspect and set up our website based on our needs. When it came down to the meat of our project, Ben and I divided in half our analyses - I took the comparative lead and he took the canon lead. Not to say we didn’t ease the load on each other where we could: I had a painstaking - but admittedly fun - time putting together the interactive timeline; Ben prepared and cleaned datasets for me to graph the comparative analyses for nationality and gender. Ben, having done much of the cleaning and harvesting, felt comfortable typing up our process. That was a large task, so I wanted to take the lead in typing up a draft of our paradata to equal the load. Ultimately, we had a sense of what each other was working on at all times, and were conscious of giving an equal effort and supporting each other where we could. It was a very natural partnership.

Troubleshooting: We ran into very few problems between ourselves. The obvious issues came from problems that arose in the project itself, whether we couldn’t figure out a regex script that would work or our visualizations wouldn’t appear properly online. At these times, we came together and took a few hours to find a solution. We aren’t very confrontational people - very few arguments, if any, erupted.

Presentation: While I did take the lead on formatting our website and many of our visualizations, the vision for our project was collaborative. We made good use of our wordpress domains and ended up with an interactive, and I think, intuitive design for our project. In comparison to what could have been a dry essay on 20 sheets of paper, I think we came up with a fresh contribution to digital history. (And saved a few trees, probably.)

Final Reflection: I have no complaints about working with Ben. I think we divided our work fairly, allowed each other to pursue our own interests and worked to each other’s strengths. As previously mentioned, we ended up with a project that was greater than either of us could produce as an individual, but one that makes both of us equally proud. Hope you enjoy perusing the website.

**Benjamin Doyle**

I just want to say at the beginning that working with Craig in this project and progressing through the course together was great! For a self-directed course like this, it is really nice to have a roommate to kick your butt and a wall to bounce ideas off. We were not sure we were going to do the final project together for the first month of the course. After we decided that we were both interested in the same project - looking at The Open Syllabus Project - it was a simple decision. We were conscious throughout our project that working together meant that we had to produce a larger final project and took the challenge to heart. With luck, we have produced a final project that clearly shows a strong understanding of the concepts learned in this course.

Planning: Looking back, it was interesting how the project came together. We started off individually with different expectations for how the project would look. Being a Humanities student, I loved the idea of taking a look at the Great Books and was quite excited by the many possibilities The Open Syllabus Project offered. The comparative approach was evident to us both. When comparing our individual conceptions of the course, we were able to design a basic outline together of the project you see today. A bit of playing with different technologies (sometimes unsuccessfully - see my blog) allowed us to focus on exactly what we wanted to look at. I would say the planning component of the project was organic and without significant conflict.

Work Distribution: Organic is also a word I would use to describe the work distribution. We have known each other since first year and have taken a course together before. There was never any conflict and we both seemed to be pretty good at demonstrating initiative and doing something that needs to be done. (Having worked with other teams, I know that this is certainly not the case in many instances.) I took the lead on the data cleaning and adding supplemental information (I really enjoy this part of digital history, even if it is time consuming sometimes) while Craig took the lead on setting up our online presence (he has more experience with web design). In terms of writing the content of our project, I took the lead on the content Introduction, Process, and Canon Analysis pages while Craig took the lead on the Comparative, References, and Paradata pages. We were each responsible for taking the lead with visuals for our respective pages. There was plenty of cross contribution as we wrote the Reflection together, contributed substantially to each others’ pages (i.e. I wrote the Humanities comparison section), and we edited each others’ pages. Looking back, it was a pretty good work distribution that made use of our respective talents.

Trouble-shooting: I don’t have a lot to say here other than we were pretty good at working through problems when they arose. Being roommates, we didn’t generally need to schedule meetings as we could just chat when we bumped into each other. The project was pretty smooth from start to finish. We did a lot more trouble-shooting throughout the course work (which was often challenging). Once we got to the final project, we had a pretty good idea of what we wanted to do and then did a good job delivering on that vision.

Presentation: I mentioned earlier that Craig took the lead on setting up the web page for our project while we shared the writing and analysis work. At the end of the project, we realized that our writing amounted to over 10000 words, not including the datasets or visualizations. Looking back, it really was a large project! I’m fairly happy with our presentation in the end as it makes good use of the materials and resources we produced. (As a side note, I must apologize for the somewhat incoherent naming conventions used in our Github repository. It really is easy for those to spiral out of control!)

Final Reflection: Overall, working with Craig on this project was a real pleasure. For a class predicated on individual work with little in-person interaction, it was really nice to have someone to work with. I hope the work we showed was sufficient for a partnership as it was often quite beneficial to have two people working on the project when the To Do list continued to grow. I hope you have enjoyed our final product!