

Digital Humanities for the History of the Book

UCLA California Rare Book School, Summer 2025

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Class materials: [GitHub Link](#)
See welcome email for the course Zoom link

Course Description

This course introduces digital humanities methods, workflows, and use cases by applying them to questions from literary studies and history. We will begin by examining the processes by which written, printed, and visual materials become digital, asking what is gained and lost along the way. What kinds of claims can we make about “data” as a result of how it was curated or transformed? What questions can we ask when we increase our scale of study to hundreds or thousands of texts? Over the week, we will work closely with texts and their accompanying metadata to see what new information we might glean by incorporating digital tools into our practice.

Digital humanities is an expansive, rapidly developing area of research. This course is designed to give you a foundation, introducing you to approaches and resources you can continue to draw on after the week concludes. You will gain hands-on experience working with popular open source tools used by digital humanities practitioners. You will also learn best practices for developing your own digital humanities projects, from curating a dataset and identifying a suitable method of analysis to creating effective and compelling data visualizations you can share.

This course is intended for students, faculty, and library staff who are interested in taking on or supporting digital humanities projects, or who are just looking for an introduction to the field. No prior programming experience or existing project is required. Sample data will be provided.

Format

Since this course will be taught remotely, we will have a combination of synchronous and asynchronous activities. The synchronous portion of each day will be divided into three components:

- Discussion — We’ll consider case studies and methods at a conceptual level
- Workshop — We’ll practice a method using open source or free(mium) software
- Open lab — You’ll have the opportunity to develop your own projects or continue experimenting with the sample data

The asynchronous portion will consist of readings that will help inform our discussions, project reviews that will provide an opportunity for engaging with digital humanities work more closely, and hands-on practice exercises that will reinforce the workshop material.

Learning Objectives

Through this course, you will:

- Develop an understanding of data—its history, contexts, and uses—in the (digital) humanities
- Learn how to prepare datasets of varying scales

- Identify appropriate methods for pursuing different research questions
- Gain experience working with out-of-the-box data analysis and visualization software
- Establish a foundation for continuing with research in the digital humanities

Readings & Software

All texts for this class are freely available. In addition to the readings we'll discuss in class, I'll also provide optional readings in our course GitHub repository that you can follow-up with if you become interested in an area and want to dive deeper. In preparation for the first class, please read [“Big? Smart? Clean? Messy? Data in the Humanities,”](#) by Christof Schöch.

The software we're using in this course is either open source or has a free account option that we'll use. For software that requires installation, please try to have it installed prior to the class in which we'll be using it. I'm available over email or Zoom to assist with any installation hiccups. You can use a Windows or Mac computer.

Project Reviews

To help concretize the material we'll be covering in discussion, I've selected a project to accompany the reading for most days. When interacting with these projects, I encourage you to consider:

The Visualization

- What is the visualization trying to communicate?
- Is the argument explanatory or is it more exploratory?
- In what ways is it effective or ineffective?

The Data

- Is it open or in copyright — how can you tell?
- How was it collected, processed, or transformed?
- What's missing from the digitized version of the data?

The Method

- What questions can—or can't—you ask of the data as a result of the technical approach?

The Team

- Who are the creators behind the project?
- What are their areas of expertise?
- Is there a funding source?

The Results

- What are your takeaways from the project?

These projects will provide sample use cases that show how the various methods we'll be discussing can be used in practice. Additionally, these projects will offer insight into how digital humanities projects typically come together and find expression online.

Schedule (Pacific Time)

Monday, August 4 — Data in the Humanities

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| 9:30am — 11:00am | Discussion: Digital Humanities Participant and course introductions Overview — what is digital humanities? what do we mean by “data”? Discussion of the reading |
| 11:30am — 1:00pm | Workshop: Preparing data with OpenRefine |
| 2:00pm — 3:00pm | Open Lab |
| Your time | Readings & practice exercises — links will be shared on GitHub |

Tuesday, August 5 — Data Visualization in the Humanities

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| 9:30am — 11:00am | Discussion: Data Visualization Overview — how do we design with data and humans in mind? Discussion of the reading Sample visualizations |
| 11:30am — 1:00pm | Workshop: Visualizing data with Tableau Public |
| 2:00pm — 3:00pm | Open Lab |
| Your time | Readings & practice exercises — links will be shared on GitHub |

Wednesday, August 6 — Texts

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| 9:30am — 11:00am | Discussion: Text Analysis Overview — what is it? what questions and data is it well suited for? key terms? Discussion of the reading Sample projects |
| 11:30am — 1:00pm | Workshop: Extracting named entities with Stanza and Google Colab |
| 2:00pm — 3:00pm | Open Lab |
| 4:30pm | <i>Optional CalRBS event. Lecture by Philip Palmer and discussion</i> |
| Your time | Readings & practice exercises — links will be shared on GitHub |

Thursday, August 7 — Networks

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| 9:30am — 11:00am | Discussion: Network Analysis Overview — what is it? what questions and data is it well suited for? key terms? Discussion of the reading Sample projects |
| 11:30am — 1:00pm | Workshop: Creating network graphs with Gephi |
| 2:00pm — 3:00pm | Open Lab |
| Your time | Readings & practice exercises – links will be shared on GitHub |

Friday, August 8 — Maps & Publishing

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| 9:30am — 11:00am | Discussion: Geospatial Analysis & Sharing Digital Humanities Work Overview — what is it? what questions and data is it well suited for? key terms? Discussion of the reading Sample projects |
| 11:30am — 1:00pm | Workshop: Mapping with Old Maps Online, ArcGIS Online, and StoryMaps |
| 2:00pm — 3:00pm | Open Lab |
| Your time | Readings & practice exercises – links will be shared on GitHub |