SPA 410 / MLL 410 (Section P)
Digital Literacy through Cultural and Literary Topics:
Digital Approaches to Life Writing

Instructors: Susanna Allés-Torrent, Euge Stumm
Prerequisite: WRS 106 or ENG 106 or WRS 107 or ENG 107.
Prerequisite: SPA 301 or SPA 302 or SPA 303 or SPA 307.
When: Tu/Th 11:00-12:15pm
Where: Merrick 205
Office Hours: Tu. and Th. 12:30PM-1:30PM & By Appointment (Merrick 210.23)

1. Description

In this hands-on course, we will explore how individuals narrate their own lives, and the lives of others, and how digital methods are transforming the ways we study these narratives. Focusing on *life writing* as a genre—including autobiography, biography, letters, memoirs, diaries, and testimonies—we will trace its evolution over time and examine it through the lens of digital humanities. By treating texts as data, students will learn computational methods for collecting, annotating, analyzing, and interpreting life-writing materials, while also engaging critically with broader cultural, historical, and ethical issues. We will ask: How do digital approaches change our understanding of life writing? What biases exist in the digitization of marginalized voices? How can we use digital methods ethically and responsibly in studying personal texts?
We will examine autobiographical and biographical writings that challenge dominant and non canonical narratives. We will read works by medieval and early modern figures such as Leonor López de Córdoba, Álvaro de Luna, Afro-Iberian, queer, or Indigenous voices, such as Catalina de Erauso, Felipe Guamán Poma, and Juan Francisco Manzano, and contemporary authors, such as Gloria Anzaldúa.At the same time, students will experiment with a range of digital tools and methods that extend and enrich our readings. Topics covered include: Text encoding and annotation, Text mining and topic modeling, Digital mapping, Named entity recognition, Digital storytelling, and Digital publishing. The course also considers critical debates in life writing and digital humanities, such as self-representation in data-driven analysis, the ethics of digital archival work, and the challenges of computationally interpreting personal narratives.

The course is taught in English, but working documents will be in Spanish, so previous knowledge of Spanish is strongly recommended. Finally, this course is ideal for students interested in literature, history, gender studies, digital humanities, and cultural studies. No prior technical experience is required, just curiosity and a willingness to explore new ways of engaging with texts and digital data.

Nota Bene: Instructors reserve the right to implement slight changes in the syllabus through the semester, if considered needed.

2. Goals

By the end of the course, students will:

- Develop a critical understanding of life writing as a literary genre and cultural practice across time and space.
- Engage deeply with autobiographical texts through close reading and contextual analysis.
- Learn and apply digital methods (e.g., text encoding, mapping, text mining) to analyze and interpret life-writing materials.
- Reflect on the ethical, political, and epistemological implications of treating personal narratives as data.
- Gain technical skills in text encoding, digital annotation, data visualization, and computational text analysis.
- Collaborate using digital platforms such as GitHub and Jekyll to create and share scholarly materials.
- Produce a final digital project that demonstrates their ability to integrate literary interpretation with digital methods.

3. Grading

What?	%	Description	When?
Self-assessment 1st third of the semester … 5% 2nd third of the semester … 5% 3rd third of the semester … 5%	15%	See Self-Assessment and Grading Reflection below	Sept. 16, 2025 Oct. 9, 2025 Nov. 4, 2025
Attendance and Participation	10%	Just come to class, come prepared, do the homework and complete the assignments :)	
Glossary	5%	Throughout the semester you will have to populate a collaborative Glossary for new terms (English-Spanish)	
Leonor López de Córdoba's project ● Critical notes: 60% ● Semantic tagging: 40%	10%	Storymap with Leaflet	Sept. 11, 2025

Álvaro de Luna's project	10%	Digital experiments on text mining and short Essay: From Close to Distant Reading with Voyant and AntConc	Sept. 25, 2025
Catalina de Erauso's project	10%	Collaborative Storymaps with Leaflet	Oct. 9, 2025
Guamán Poma's project	10%	Topic Modelling and Image Annotation	Oct. 23, 2025
Juan Francisco Manzano's project	10%	AI and textual experiments with LLM and Chat4All.	Oct. 30, 2025
Final Project Professors' grading … 10% General Self-assessment 10%	20%	Collaborative project.	Dec. 4, 2025
TOTAL:	100		

Self-Assessment and Grading Reflection

We know that learning isn't always visible in grades, and not every effort shows up on a rubric. That's why this course includes three ongoing self-assessment: moments throughout the semester when you'll reflect on your work, growth, and engagement.

You'll be asked to keep track of your progress—documenting the activities you complete, the skills you develop, and the contributions you make (individually and collaboratively). This ongoing reflection will help you build a record of your work that you'll draw from when suggesting the final grade you believe you deserve.

At the end of the course, you'll submit a final self-assessment explaining what grade you think reflects your overall engagement, effort, and learning. This grade should be based on evidence—specific examples of your work, participation, and growth. Your voice matters in how your work is evaluated, and we want to ensure that your full contribution to the course is recognized.

4. Required materials and tools

Primary and secondary readings

All primary texts and secondary readings will be accessible online—either freely available on the internet or through our **University of Miami Richter Library's digital holdings**. In most cases,

we will work with selected excerpts rather than full texts. These selections will be indicated by the instructor in advance and provided in the appropriate format (PDF, plain text, TEI/XML, etc.) on our course GitHub or website.

1. Leonor López de Córdoba, *Memorias* (c. 1400)
2. Álvaro de Luna, *Libro de las virtuosas e claras mugeres* (15th century)
3. Catalina de Erauso, *La monja alférez* (c. 1600)
4. Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (c. 1615)
5. Juan Francisco Manzano, *Autobiografía de un esclavo* (1839)
6. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987)

Additional brief texts may be introduced throughout the semester for context or comparison.

A selection of critical and methodological texts (secondary readings) will accompany our primary readings. These may include: introductory texts prepared by the instructors, introductions to life writing theory, readings on digital humanities methods, articles on textual editing, archival ethics, and digital storytelling, etc. All assigned secondary readings will be posted or linked directly from the course website or GitHub repository.

Note: There is no required textbook to purchase for this course.

Tools and softwares

This course emphasizes accessible and sustainable digital scholarship. All tools and platforms we use are either open source or freely available online. No software purchases are required, and installation guides will be provided when needed. Throughout the semester, students will engage with the following tools for collaboration, analysis, visualization, and digital publication:

- **GitHub**: Collaborative version control and website hosting.
  - https://github.com/
- **GitHub Desktop**: GUI interface for Git and GitHub.
  - https://desktop.github.com/download/
- **CollectionBuilder**: Static site generator for digital collections (based on Jekyll),
  - https://collectionbuilder.github.io/
- **Voyant Tools**: Text analysis and visualization suite
  - https://voyant-tools.org/
- **Leaflet**: Tools for spatial storytelling and interactive maps.
  - https://leafletjs.com/
- **Recogito**: Semantic annotation platform for texts and images.
  - https://recogito.pelagios.org/
- **Visual Studio Code (VS Code)**: Code editor for working with HTML, Markdown, TEI/XML, and more.
  - https://code.visualstudio.com/
- **GPT4ALL**: Framework for hosting local, off-line Large Language Models: https://www.nomic.ai/gpt4all

5. How does it work?

This course meets in person twice a week. Each session will generally combine assigned readings (to be completed before class) with hands-on digital exercises. Our goal is to balance some theory and critical thinking with technical exploration in every class.

Infrastructure

All course materials—syllabus, readings, rubrics, updates, assignments, and deadlines—will be housed in GitHub and GitHub Pages:
- GitHub (repository): https://github.com/dh-miami/SPA_410_Fall25
- GitHub Pages (course website): https://dh-miami.github.io/SPA_410_Fall25/

GitHub is our collaborative workspace where code and course content live. You will contribute directly to this repository. The idea is that your work will be part of a public-facing digital project, and you'll be able to see your contributions on our course website.

Structure of Hands-On Work

Hands-on exercises will follow this rhythm:

1. Introduction in class: tools, workflows, and sample materials.
2. Independent work: you'll continue and expand the work at home
3. Follow-up in class: we troubleshoot, reflect, and refine together

While the course includes technical components, no prior experience in programming or web design is required. What is essential is your willingness to experiment and engage with technology. You might get stuck. Things might break. That's expected! When this happens: try to fix it yourself (Google it, try tutorials), ask your peers or reach out to us, but mostly, be patient: it's all part of the learning process. 🙂

This course may feel different from any Spanish or literature class you've taken before. At times, you may wonder how it all connects. That's normal, and part of the journey. But as we build our digital projects and deepen our analysis of texts, you'll begin to see how literary studies and digital tools intersect in powerful ways.

And remember, as we say in Spanish: "nadie nace sabiendo", no one is born knowing. You're here to learn.

6. Late assignment

Throughout the course, you'll complete a variety of assignments, some will be longer written reflections or essays, while others will be shorter digital exercises submitted via GitHub.

Deadlines will be always specified in the rubrics for the assignments. If you anticipate needing more time, please <u>email us at least 48 hours in advance</u> to request an extension. We understand that life happens, and we'll do our best to accommodate you. If an assignment is <u>submitted late without prior notice, 10% will be deducted from the final grade for that task</u>.

7. Attendance and Participation

Attendance is mandatory. You must come to class and come prepared. Since this course is primarily discussion-based and includes regular hands-on work, your presence is essential. Missing class means missing out on key concepts, technical guidance, and collaborative activities, which may make it difficult for you to keep up and can disrupt the group's workflow.

We will check attendance in every class. You are allowed to miss up to **three classes without penalty**. More than three absences will result in a grade deduction. You do not need to submit official documentation (e.g., doctor's notes or mentor letters); we extend the benefit of the doubt, but we ask that you be honest, with yourself, with us, and with your peers. If you do miss a class, you are responsible for emailing us and catching up with classmates to stay on track.

If you arrive <u>more than 15 minutes late</u>, it will count as half an absence. Please note that in a small class like ours, lateness disrupts the group dynamic, so make your best effort to be on time.

Participation is a key part of your learning in this course. You are expected to:

- Complete readings and exercises before class
- Actively contribute to discussions
- Engage respectfully and thoughtfully with peers and instructors
- Be fully present: no browsing, checking emails, or unrelated computer use

We've designed this course to build progressively. If you miss one step, you may find the next one difficult to follow. **It's your responsibility** to catch up on missed work, and we strongly encourage you to reach out to peers and check GitHub for updates.

Please note: The class will not be recorded under any circumstances.

Laptops

You must bring all assigned readings and materials to class, as well as your laptop. However, laptops will only be used during hands-on exercises. During reading discussions and instructor explanations, we ask that you take notes by hand to foster focus and minimize distractions. Do not mirror your phone in your laptop during class and avoid the use of instant messaging apps in your laptop. To ensure the best quality of attention during our class, intrusive notifications in your laptop must be turned off. If you do not own a laptop or cannot bring one to class, please let us know in advance so we can make arrangements to use the computers available in our classroom.

Smartphones (do not use)

Students are not allowed to utilize smartphones or other portable digital devices with intrusive notifications during class. If you urgently need to receive a call or send a message, please, leave the classroom to do so and return as soon as possible. Otherwise, do not make calls, check your phone, or text phone messages during class. Exceptions for this rule require that students provide medical documents or formal letters from Center for Disability Services stating that the use of smartphones or portable digital devices with intrusive notifications are needed in the classroom. This choice serves for guiding the best quality of your attention to the work with your peers and instructors during class.

8. The language of the course

This course will be taught **primarily in English**, but **Spanish will be used regularly** for class discussions, readings, and materials. All students will engage with texts in Spanish, and many of our discussions will take place bilingually.

- Students enrolled in SPA are expected to complete all written assignments and oral presentations in Spanish, although you may request to complete up to two out of six projects in English.
- Students enrolled in MLL may complete all written assignments in English, although primary texts will still be in Spanish. However, if they wish, they can do oral and written assignments also in Spanish.

We recognize that this is an intellectually demanding course, but it is not a language course. While Spanish plays a central role, we welcome the use of English in discussions when needed to clarify ideas or support comprehension. What matters most is that you understand the material and feel confident expressing your thoughts. Switching languages to facilitate learning is part of our inclusive and supportive classroom environment.

If you encounter any language-related challenges—such as unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar questions, or difficulty understanding expressions—please don't hesitate to ask. Language questions are always welcome, and we're here to support you.

As part of your learning, you will also be asked to build a **collective glossary** to track terms and expressions that you find challenging. This glossary should include at least **30 entries**, focusing on bilingual academic vocabulary relevant to our course (e.g., *encoding → codificación*). This will serve as a valuable resource for your development as a reader and writer across languages.

9. We are Here for You

Throughout the semester, you might encounter challenges—whether related to the course material, technology, or assignments—and we want you to know that we're here to help. Our office doors are always open when we're around, and we're more than happy to sit down with you to troubleshoot, discuss your work, or simply talk things through.

Office/Student Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, **12:00–1:30 PM**
You're also welcome to make an appointment with us outside those times, either in person or via Zoom. Please don't hesitate to reach out!

Students with disabilities: Students with disabilities are to provide official documentation from the Office of Disability Services to instructors at the beginning of the semester in order to request any relevant accommodations.

10. Honor Code

We take academic integrity very seriously in this course. You are expected to produce original work and to properly acknowledge any sources you use, whether these are books, articles, websites, or digital tools like AI.

Any form of plagiarism—including copying from the internet, submitting work that is not your own, or failing to cite sources—will not be tolerated. If you use someone else's ideas, words, or research, you must provide full credit using appropriate citations.

If you choose to use AI tools such as ChatGPT to support your work, you must clearly indicate how and where you used them. You will be required to submit the full prompt(s) and the resulting conversation with your assignment.

We strongly encourage you to review the **University of Miami Honor Code**, which outlines expectations for academic conduct: [UM Undergraduate Honor Code (PDF)](#).

11. Course Schedule

Week and date	Topics	Technology used
PART I — Introduction to Digital Literacy and Life Writing		
Week 1	**Introduction to Digital Literacy and Life Writing (I)**	
Tu., Aug. 19 (1)	- Presentation and goals of the course. - What is Life Writing? - What is DH? Discussion. **For next class:** 1. Written short presentation of yourselves. 2. Explore a DH project.	Brief intro to GitHub.
Th., Aug. 21 (2)	- Explore digital projects (Guidelines provided). - What techniques do DH projects use? - Video: What is DH? - Discussion of student examples. **For next class:** Analysis of a DH + Life Writing project.	More on GitHub and GitHub Desktop (upload your presentations). Fast intro to Markup.
Week 2	**Introduction to Digital Literacy and Life Writing (II)**	
Tu., Aug. 26 (3)	- Discussion and analysis of DH projects. - What is data in the Humanities? - Case study: Video and discussion: Van Gogh's Three Pairs of Shoes - Explore Arts+Science. **For next class**: Read Leonor's *Memorias*.	GitHub, GitHub Desktop, Markdown. Upload analysis to GitHub.
Th. Aug. 28 (4)	- How to transform a biography into data? - Introducing the first autobiographical text in Spanish: **Leonor López de Córdoba.** - Exercise: Creating categories of analysis. **For next class:** 1 paragraph reflection on life writing and digital methods. - Video: What is Data?	Collection Builder (Jekyll) Basics
Part II: Writing Lives in the Medieval Ages		
Week 3		

Tu., Sept 2 (5)	**Leonor López de Córdoba (1)** ● Historical context: late medieval Castile. ● The life of Leonor. What data can we find? ● Linguistic challenges. ● **For next day:** Watch Mujeres en la historia (50min.)	Upload reflection paragraph in GitHub (CB).
Th., Sept. 4 (6)	**Leonor López de Córdoba (2)** ● Close reading and discussion. ● Division of labor: Reported speech for Leonor's story. ● **For next class**: prepare texts for Storymap.	Intro to Leaflet and spreadsheet data input.
Week 4		
Tu., Sept. 9 (7)	**Leonor López de Córdoba (3)** ● Narrating Leonor's life. ● In class work: Peer-review of Storymap texts and data. ● **For next class:** Read Luna's biography selection.	Leaflet and spreadsheet data input.
Th., Sept. 11 (8)	**Collection of women in the 15th century (1)** ● Who was Álvaro de Luna (readings). ● Historical and cultural context ● Libro de las virtuosas e claras mugeres ● What is a corpus of texts? Formats. ● **For next day:** Reading and bring examples of "virtues" found in the readings.	● Voyant tools. ● Creation of stopword list.
Week 5		
Tu., Sept. 16 (9)	**Collection of women in the 15th century (2)** ● Linguistic challenges. ● Discussion of "virtues". ● Text mining reading discussion. ● **For next class:** Read a selection of biographies: women's virtues compared to men.	● Experiments with Voyant and Antconc.
Th., Sept. 18 (10)	**Collection of women in the 15th century (3)** ● Discussion: Virtues in women vs men. Guest: Elizabeth Cornick and her class. ● **For next class:** prepare paper From Close to Distant Reading with Voyant and/or AntConc.	● Distant reading and visualizing patterns.
Part III: Colonial and Early Indigenous and Afro-Iberian Voices		

Week 6		
Tu., Sept. 23 (11)	**Mujeres virtuosas (4)** ● Discussion on your paper From Close to Distant Reading. ● Introduction to Catalina de Erauso. ● **For next class:** Read Catalina de Erauso, *Vida y sucesos de la Monja Alférez* (selection 1).	Setup your space in Collection Builder.
Th., Sept. 25 (12)	**Catalina de Erauso (1)** ● Close reading of *Vida y sucesos de la Monja Alférez*. ● **For next class:** Read Catalina de Erauso, *Vida y sucesos de la Monja Alférez* (selection 2).	Leaflet and spreadsheet data input.
Week 7		
Tu., Sept. 30 (13)	Guest speaker: Antonio Álvarez-Osorio, How is a scholarly biography crafted?	
Th., Oct. 2 (14)	**Catalina de Erauso (2)** ● Close reading of *Vida y sucesos de la Monja Alférez*. ● **For next class:** Read Catalina de Erauso, *Vida y sucesos de la Monja Alférez* (selection 3).	Leaflet and spreadsheet data input.
Week 8		
Tu., Oct. 7 (15)	**Catalina de Erauso (3)** ● Digital storytelling of *Vida y sucesos de la Monja Alférez*. ● **For next class:** Read Catalina de Erauso, *Vida y sucesos de la Monja Alférez* (selection 4).	Leaflet and spreadsheet data input.
Th., Oct. 9 (16)	**Catalina de Erauso (4)** ● Digital storytelling of *Vida y sucesos de la Monja Alférez*.	Leaflet and spreadsheet data input.
Week 9		
Tu., Oct. 14	FALL RECESS - NO CLASS	
Th., Oct. 16 (17)	**Guaman Poma (1)** ● Historical context: the arrival of Spaniards in Perú. ● *El primer nueva corónica y buen gobierno* (1615)	

	● Explore [Digital facsimile](#) <mark>Guest Speaker: Gimena del Rio Riande</mark>	
Week 10		
Tu., Oct. 21 (18)	**Guaman Poma (2)** ● Close reading and discussion of selected texts. ● Keywords and topics ● [Game](#) adaptation of Guaman Poma in Quechua, Spanish, and English ● **For next class:** bring images connected to keywords.	Topic modelling. Setup your space in Collection Builder to publish results.
Th., Oct. 23 (19)	**Guaman Poma (3)** ● Discussion of keywords and topics and illustrations. ● **For next class:** Read selection of Manzano's *Autobiografía*.	Topic modelling. Annotation of images.
Week 11		
Tu., Oct. 28 (20)	**Juan Francisco Manzano, *Autobiografía de un esclavo* (1839) (1)** ● Manzano's context and life. ● A primary source: [Ms. original](#) ● Natural Language Processing VS Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) ● Discussion: Prompting with AI. ● **For next class:** bring potential questions to the text.	Install GPT4All Intro to RAG
Th., Oct. 30 (21)	**Juan Francisco Manzano, *Autobiografía de un esclavo* (1839) (2)** ● Exploring questions via GPT4All. ● Other 19th c. narratives of enslaved people. ● **For next class:** Read Anzaldúa's Borderlands: Chapter 1	GPT4All experiments
Part III: Contemporary voices		
Week 12		
Tu., Nov. 4 (22)	**Gloria Anzaldua (1)** ● Intro to Anzaldúa's context, life and work ● Close Reading of chapter 1	Set up spreadsheets

	● Organization of groups and topics - How to put in place a collaborative project ● **For next class:** Read Chapter 2.	for StoryMaps with Leaflet.
Th., Nov. 6 (23)	**Gloria Anzaldua (2)** ● Discussion and Annotation of Chapter 2 ● Group 1 guides discussion for chapter 2 ● Groups 2 and 3 will prepare questions to assist Group 1 ● **For next class:** Read Chapter 3.	Input spreadsheets for StoryMaps with Leaflet.
Week 13		
Tu., Nov. 11 (24)	**Gloria Anzaldua (3)** ● Discussion of Chapter 3 ● Group 2 will guide discussion for chapter 3 ● Groups 1 and 3 will prepare questions to assist Group 2 ● **For next class:** Read Chapter 5.	Input spreadsheets for StoryMaps with Leaflet.
Th. Nov, 13 (25)	**Gloria Anzaldua (4)** ● Discussion of Chapter 5 ● Group 3 will guide discussion for chapter 5 ● Groups 1 and 2 will prepare questions to assist Group 3 ● **For next class:** work on the content of your projects.	Input spreadsheets for StoryMaps with Leaflet.
Week 14		
Tu., Nov. 18 (26)	In class work of team projects	Troubleshooting
Th. Nov. 20 (27)	Pre-final project overview. Group evaluation of the class (last 20 minute of class)	
Week 15 - Nov. 25 - 27 Thanksgiving		
Week 16		
Tu., Dec. 2 (28)	Last day or class: Presentation of final projects.	
Tu., Dec. 9	Final projects due	

8. Resources

Other works left behind:

- Juan Garrido, el conquistador negro en las Antillas, Florida, México y California,1503-1540.
  https://archive.org/embed/juan-garrido-by-ricardo-alegria-1990-san-juan-puerto-rico
- Biographies of soldiers (c. 1500)
- Teresa de Ávila, *Libro de la vida* (1562-65)
  - A deeply personal and mystical account, subverting ecclesiastical norms by positioning a woman as a religious authority.
- Juana de la Cruz, *Autobiografía* (early 16th century)
  - A visionary mystic who, in her sermons, described gender-fluid spiritual experiences and was revered as a Christ-like figure by her followers.
- Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda, *Mística ciudad de Dios* (1670s)
  - A nun who, through mystical visions, claimed to have evangelized Indigenous people in the Americas without leaving Spain.
- Garcilaso de la Vega, *Comentarios reales de los incas* (1609, 1617)
  - A mestizo writer reclaiming Incan history and challenging Spanish colonial narratives.

- María Zambrano, *Delirio y destino* (written 1953, published 1989).
  - A memoir of exile by a Spanish philosopher who critiqued Franco's dictatorship and patriarchal structures.
- Montserrat Roig, *Dime que me quieres aunque sea mentira* (1991).
  - A feminist reflection on writing, memory, and the politics of gender.
- Rosa Montero, *La ridícula idea de no volver a verte* (2013).
  - A feminist and intellectual memoir, linking personal grief with the life of Marie Curie.
- Lina Meruane, *Volverse Palestina* (2014).
  - A powerful memoir exploring Jewish-Palestinian identity, migration, and intersectional belonging.
- Brigitte Vasallo, *Pensamiento monógamo, terror poliamoroso* (2018).
  - A queer feminist critique of relationships, gender, and normativity in contemporary Spain.
- Paul Preciado, *Un apartamento en Urano: Crónicas del cruce* (2019).
  - A collection of chronicles of a Spanish trans man and his process of gender transition.
- Camila Sosa Villada, *Las Malas* (2019).
  - Autobiographical novel written by an Argentinian travesti, accounting the experiences of *travestismo* and marginalization