

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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As an instructor of literature, digital humanities, and composition, my goal is to help students to understand and think beyond cultural and disciplinary boundaries. Through student-centered, project-based teaching, I enable students to gain mastery over skills and content, and to use that knowledge to push the limits of traditional academic work. This approach stems from my research, which is grounded in a careful understanding of methods for textual production and their historical context. Similarly, in my teaching I ask students to think critically and creatively about conventions of research and communication, preparing them for sophisticated research in the humanities, while also meeting the needs of students with diverse backgrounds and educational objectives.

Digital pedagogy has led to a renewed focus on skills and methods in the humanities classroom; my objective in teaching digital humanities is to combine these quantifiable skills with a critical awareness of methodology. While working with the diverse student body at the University of Texas, I have found that student-centered workshops are particularly effective in meeting these goals. For example, my workshop on the Scalar digital publishing platform, which has been used by over 100 graduate students, undergraduate students, and instructors, helps students to produce a multimedia analysis of an archival document online. Students work through the process independently or in pairs, with minimal instructor intervention; this ensures that they depart from a course or workshop with concrete abilities and the confidence to continue learning independently. Within this framework, the instructor uses discussions and debriefings to illustrate how digital scholarship is impacted by issues of accessibility, structural biases, and the digital divide. This places the responsibility for skill-building in the hands of the students, while encouraging them to think about the privileges that these methodologies entail.

I find that diverse content brings into sharp relief both the promise and the problems of scholarly methods, particularly in the digital sphere. Such was the case in the redesigned *Digital Archives of the Central American Revolutions* seminar, a course which applied both digital and analog methods to the study of archival materials from Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. As the digital assistant to the course, I helped develop a syllabus organized around the ethics of digitization, metadata generation, and online publication for sensitive political documents. While learning to use cutting-edge digital tools for text analysis, data visualization, and publication, students were asked to think critically about the epistemological and social consequences of archival methodologies. An article on the University of Texas website described the course as “trailblazing,” calling it an “exciting and important” opportunity for historians.

Because of the fast-paced changes in digital methodologies, I prioritize both my own understanding of digital pedagogy and my relationship with the pedagogical community on campus. I have accomplished this at the University of Texas by co-organizing a digital pedagogy THATCamp and a pedagogy workshop. Like our students, as instructors we benefit from both a critical and practical understanding of methods for scholarly work. My task as a teacher is to foster this understanding in my students, my community, and myself.

Sample Syllabus: Archive Fever

An introduction to digital humanities through the archive

Course Description

Archive fever is both the pleasure and the pain of working with primary sources: historical books, manuscripts, letters, and ephemera. Historians work feverishly in the archive to gather up and interpret the documented past. Librarians are fired up by the feverish desire to produce new digital collections based on old archival documents, making history publically available for the first time. But archive fever is also dangerous: like the anthrax that floated in the dust of Victorian libraries, it can sicken the spirit, the body, and the mind. In this course we explore the ways that archives are created, the ways we use them, and the stories they tell. At the same time, we consider the dark side of the archive: the dangerous silences and contaminated histories that they contain.

Course Structure

The course is divided into four sections, each of which tackles three aspects of archival studies: the *practical* work of building archives, the *critical* work of analyzing archives, and the *imaginative* work of writing about archives. The first section considers how collections of documents are created, why, and to what end. We consider the history of the collections on campus, and of the digital collections available online, while reading a novel about provenance, or the study of the history of a book. In the second section, we explore the practical labor of producing digital collections, while exploring some of the risks and challenges inherent in making historical records available online. During this time, we read a novel about the dangers of digitization. In the third section, we explore various tools for organizing and displaying archival documents, while reading two novels about the postcolonial archive. The final section is dedicated to student projects

Course Assignments

Students are expected to complete three major projects over the course of this semester:

1. Blog (20%): Weekly posts of 400-600 words.
Each student will choose a digital archive or collection appropriate to their area of interest. You will then respond to weekly prompts asking you to think critically about your collection of choice.
2. Workshops (20%): Weekly worksheets completed (mostly) in class.
3. Critical Analysis (30%)
The critical analysis asks you to develop a research question related to the use, history, or literary representation of archives. Based on this question, you will design a methodology for answering your question and write an essay describing your analysis. Unlike a traditional argumentative essay, this assignment does not ask you to begin with a thesis. Rather, you will try to find multiple possible answers to your research question based on your chosen method. This will be evaluated according to: the appropriateness of your research question, the soundness of your methods, the consistency of your analysis, and the quality of

your writing.

4. Digital Project (30%)

After completing your written assignment, you will be asked to take one aspect of your research over the course of the semester and represent it visually using the tools that we studied in class. You may draw from your blog posts or your critical analysis, and may use visual platforms, mapping platforms, timelines, or archival displays. You will be graded based on a rubric developed in class.

Course Schedule

Part 1: Bibliophilia

Theme: What are libraries? What are archives? Where do they come from? Who builds them? Why? What for?

Fiction: Jorge Luis Borges, “The Library of Babel” and “Tlön Uqbar Orbis Tertius”; Geraldine Brooks, *The People of the Book*.

Criticism: Selections from Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; Michel Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*

Workshops: Provenance study of on-campus collections; Metadata study of online collections

Assignments: Blogging; research question and proposal draft

Part 2: Brain Fever

Theme: How are archives built? How does their structure reflect their meaning? What happens when archives don’t fit neatly into the meanings we assign to them?

Fiction: Robin Sloane, *Mr. Penumbra’s 24-Hour Bookstore*

Criticism: Selections from Mara Mills, Ann Laura Stoler

Workshops: Optical Character Recognition, TEI Encoding

Assignments: Research Proposal and Critical Analysis

Part 3: Archive Fever

Theme: What are the politics of the archive? What makes archives political, and how can our engagement with archives be political?

(non)-Fiction: Nalo Hopkinson, *The Salt Roads*; Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers*

Criticism: Selections from: Kim Christen Withey, “Does Information Want to be Free?”; Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*

Workshops: Digital Mapping, Digital Timelines, Scalar, Omeka.

Assignment: Digital project proposal

Part 4: revision

Workshop: Peer Review

Assignment: Digital Project