

Introduction to Digital Humanities

This seminar will introduce the digital humanities as a community of practice, a growing interdisciplinary field, and a set of approaches to research and teaching. Students in this course will explore a wide range of arguments and techniques, spanning such topics as critical code studies, technology in the classroom, digital editions, text and network analysis, machine learning, and data visualization. We will mix seminar discussion with hands-on activities designed to invite students to participate in DH's expanding community and to interrogate the methods, aims, and boundaries of digital scholarship in the twenty-first century.

Learning Goals

During this quarter, you will:

- build a collective, multifaceted definition of the digital humanities out of the current debates and concerns in the field
- learn to think about humanities scholarship with/as data
- review current digital projects and explore a range of computational skills
- critique contemporary discourses of the digital humanities and of technology in general
- take first steps toward a digital project that fits into your current research

Course Materials

Many of our materials are available online, and all relevant links are in the class schedule below. In addition, we'll use these four books:

- Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein, *Data Feminism* (Open access, free web copy: <https://data-feminism.mitpress.mit.edu/>, or ISBN 9780262044004 if you prefer a physical copy)
- Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (ISBN 1479837245)
- Roopika Risam, *New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis, and Pedagogy* (ISBN 9780810138858, 25% off from NU Press with code NUP19)
- Ted Underwood, *Distant Horizons: Digital Evidence and Literary Change* (ISBN 9780226612836 or ebook ISBN 9780226612973)

Class Schedule

17 Sept **Introductions**

Read

Kirschenbaum, "What Is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?"

Noble, "Toward a Critical Black Digital Humanities"

Spiro, "'This is Why We Fight': Defining the Values of the Digital Humanities"

Explore

Google Ngram Viewer

EEBO Ngram Browser

24 Sept **What are Data?**

Read

Data Feminism: “Introduction: Why Data Needs Feminism” and 6. The Numbers Don’t Speak for Themselves
Lisa Gitelman and Virginia Jackson, “Introduction” to *‘Raw Data’ is an Oxymoron* (Available online at NU Library site. Let me know if you need a PDF.)
Miriam Posner, “How did they make that?”

Explore

Voyant
Palladio

RAWGraphs

[For all of the above, use the sample datasets and explore the tools’ *attitudes* toward data.]

The Data-Sitters Club

1 Oct **Histories and Archives**

Read

Buurma and Heffernan, “Josephine Miles and the Origins of Distant Reading”
Hockey, “The History of Humanities Computing” (Introduction and Beginnings only)
Selection from McGann, *Radiant Textuality* (I will distribute a PDF.)

Explore

Wordhoard
The Rosetti Archive
Sea and Spar Between

8 Oct **Describe, Analyze, Compute**

Read

Alpert-Abrams, “Machine Reading the *Primeros Libros*”
Benjamin, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*, Introduction and Chapter 3,
Coded Exposure: Is Visibility a Trap? (available online via NU Library)
Binder, “Alien Reading: Text Mining, Language Standardization, and the Humanities”

Projects

The Princeton Prosody Archive
Digital Harlem
Viral Texts
Colored Conventions

15 Oct **Modeling**

Read

Underwood, *Distant Horizons*: Chapter 1, “Do We Understand the Outlines of Literary History?” and
Chapter 3, “The Long Arc of Prestige”
Gavin, Jennings, Kersey, Pasanek, “Spaces of Meaning: Conceptual History, Vector Semantics, and Close
Readings”

Explore

Cultural Analytics (browse articles)
Open Syllabus
Underwood, Chapter 4 “Metamorphoses of Gender”
McGrath, “America’s Next Top Novel”

22 Oct **Networks**

Read

Ahnert & Ahnert, ‘Metadata, Surveillance, and the Tudor State’, *History Workshop Journal* 87 (2019) (I will
distribute a PDF.)

Weingart, “Demystifying Networks, Parts I & II”
Zer-Aviv, “If Everything is a Network, Nothing is a Network”

Explore

Six Degrees of Francis Bacon
LinkedJazz
Mapping the Republic of Letters

29 Oct **Visualization**

Read

Drucker, “Humanities Approaches to Graphical Display”
D’Ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*, Chapter 7: “Show Your Work”
Wickham, “A Layered Grammar of Graphics”

Explore

revisit RAWGraphs
StoryMap
TimelineJS (especially the “Women in Computing” example)
The Decolonial Atlas
Two Plantations

5 Nov **Pedagogy and Publics**

Read

Risam, *New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis, and Pedagogy*, Introduction,
Chapter 4: “Postcolonial Digital Pedagogy,” and Conclusion: A Call to Action
Nowvskie, “Reconstitute the World” and Change Us, Too

Explore

Torn Apart/Separados – Make sure to look at Volumes 1 & 2
Mapping Police Violence
Collections as Data
DH Syllabi Collection

12 Nov **New Media Possibilities and Limitations**

Read

Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*, Chapter 1: A Society, Searching,
Chapter 5: The Future of Knowledge in the Public, and Conclusion
Walsh, “Tweets of a Native Son: The Quotation and Recirculation of James Baldwin from Black Power to
#BlackLivesMatter”
Weingart, “The Route of a Text Message, A Love Story”

Explore

Documenting the Now
Tweets of a Native Son
Algorithmic Accountability: A Primer

19 Nov **Final Class**

We’ll reserve some time here for you to choose readings based on your interests. We’ll also briefly discuss everyone’s final projects.

A Note on Scheduling and Flexibility

As a result of the coronavirus outbreak, this class will be taught entirely online. This will be a learning experience for all of us and will require of us a great deal understanding, patience, and flexibility. Please know that I will be as flexible as possible on attendance and deadlines. I understand that your schedules

may be changing as a result of unforeseen circumstances over the next several months. If you encounter scheduling or internet connectivity issues now or over the course of the class, please let me know so that I may do everything I can to accommodate you.

We will meet each week over Zoom, but only for 2 hours instead of our scheduled 3. In lieu of the final class hour, there will be a brief workshop assignment that builds on a skill or process that we've discussed. You'll complete this on your own time and post results to Canvas. I'll be available throughout the week to answer questions and give help with the workshops.

If you encounter problems or challenges accessing any of the technologies necessary to attend class or complete assignments, please let me know right away. You will *not* be penalized for any access issues. I am committed to working with you to find ways for you to complete the course despite any technological challenges.

Finally, because of the change to online teaching, much of what we will do this quarter will be experimental, and as such it is subject to change. Zoom, for example, may wind up being untenable in the long term, but we will try it at first and do our best. The schedule, texts, and assignment plan could change throughout the quarter, but I expect most changes to be minor.

Office Hours: Wed. 3-5pm

From 3pm to 5pm on Wednesdays, I'll be holding virtual office hours. You can use this time to get help on the workshop assignments or any other aspect of the course. Because these office hours are online, **you will need to set up a time with me in advance.** We'll meet in a private Zoom chat, and I'll send you the link before our scheduled meeting time begins.

And because all our schedules are in flux right now, know that I will be happy to schedule a different time if needed. Don't hesitate to propose a separate time if the usual office hours don't work for you.

A Note on Email: Since this course will be remote, your primary way of contacting me will be via email at jrladd@northwestern.edu. I will attempt to be as responsive as possible, but it may take me up to 24 hours to reply to any message. Please keep this in mind if you anticipate any urgent issues.

Assessment

You'll be assessed in this class based on your participation in discussions, as well as written assignments and a presentation. This is not a technical course, and you will **NOT** be assessed based on technical expertise in any of the workshops. Instead, you'll be asked to write short reflections on the ways that workshop activities connect to the themes and readings of the course.

- 30%: Discussion Lead/Class Participation
- 20%: Project/Website Review
- 20%: Data Analysis Proposal
- 30%: Final Project (due Monday 8 June)

More information on all these assignments, including the discussion lead, digital project review, and final project, will be distributed at on separate assignment sheets.

Participation

Good participation should be understood as consistent and thoughtful contribution to the classroom community, an engagement with course materials and conversations, and a general responsiveness to (and respect for) one's fellow students and instructor. This isn't an accounting of how often you speak in class. Instead, it's about what you offer to the intellectual life of the class, and everyone contributes to this on-going work

in different ways. Particularly because so much of the class will consist of asynchronous work, you'll get participation credit simply for attending class and doing the work with care.

Course Policies

Especially because of this quarter's unique circumstances, I will be as flexible as possible with course policies. Each class must create its own learning community as the result of shared efforts on the part of all members. It is your responsibility as a member of this learning community to help your fellow students by attending class and turning in assignments on time. If you must miss a class or turn in an assignment late, please let me know beforehand so that we may work out a way for you to make up the work. You do *not* need a doctor's note or other written excuse, but please let me know if there are special circumstances that may prevent you from completing a large amount of coursework.

Excessive absences (more than two) or missing assignments (not turned in more than a week after the due date, without talking it over with me) that demonstrate a lack of engagement with the course may result in a reduced class participation grade, but this will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. I will reach out if I find that you have stopped engaging with the course, and we will have a chance to talk over the issue before any grade changes.

Accessibility Statement

I am committed to collaborating with you on creating an inclusive classroom. Therefore, if your work for this class requires special arrangements because of a disability, please contact AccessibleNU: <https://www.northwestern.edu/accessiblenu/index.html>. As long as I receive timely guidance from AccessibleNU, you may receive any specific accommodations for which you are eligible. AccessibleNU serves as the official university resource for approving and arranging students' accommodations, and handles all information confidentially. Please feel free to talk with me about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them.

Northwestern also offers health resources to accommodate student needs: Counseling and Psychological Services' (CAPS) professional staff members work with students to resolve personal and interpersonal difficulties, many of which can affect the academic experience: <https://www.northwestern.edu/counseling/>. And the University is committed to offering reasonable academic accommodations to students who are victims of sexual assault. Students are eligible for accommodation regardless of whether they seek criminal or disciplinary action. If you need to request such accommodations, please direct your request to the Center for Awareness, Response, and Education (CARE): <https://www.northwestern.edu/care/index.html>.

Course Content: This semester we will read texts that contain content which may be emotionally difficult. I acknowledge that each of you has their own specific life history, family context, identity, body—and that these realities have an impact on how you understand and interact with texts. Therefore, I ask you to generally familiarize yourself with the content of our course texts ahead of time, and if for any reason you believe you will be unable to participate in a discussion of certain themes or elements, please contact me beforehand and/or seek the support of any of the formal or informal resources available to you on campus, some of which are included in this syllabus. I look forward to creating a safe learning environment together this semester!