UNL Spring 2023 Digital Humanities Class Reading Responses for the first half of the semester

Something that struck me when I was first reading this article was that when asked, some of the academics did not seem to care that the tech we use can be used to surveil us. The idea that academics have been taught to accept digital technology within their classrooms and research environments as neutral resources were interesting. Currently, the sociology department has been in discussions about software that would automatically alert an undergraduate student’s academic advisor if the student's grade was to fall 50% below the class average. Some, particularly those who teach large lectures, are more open to this idea and its usefulness than others who teach smaller classes. Part of the argument for those in favor is that when teaching 400+ students a semester it can be easy for a student to fall behind and the professor does not notice or does not have the time to individually handle each case of a struggling student. On the other hand, we have discussed the idea of the potential for software such as this to invade a student's privacy and the potential of how that could affect their trust in the academic system. For example, if a student was struggling and their average fell 50% below the class average and someone outside of the class structure reaches out to them with this knowledge, it could be off-putting and feel as if they were being scrutinized and discussed without their consent. Another part of the discussion has been the idea of consent to surveillance and if students would be coerced into this type of surveillance or if there would be a way for them to opt-out. This brings a whole host of interesting issues that could be discussed, but in relation to this article I think the main thing that ties the article to this discussion is the idea that surveillance is inevitable, and we should accept it. It isn’t inevitable, and when we are a part of these conversations we need to remind ourselves that though the goal may be to help students and faculty, there is a cost of privacy, and is it a cost we should be willing to pay.

In class, we briefly discussed the idea of how the surveillance state in technology is akin to colonialism. The need for an entity to have complete control and domination over its subjects. An example this made me think of is wildfires in the western US. Indigenous people have lived on the land for generations and were able to control the outbreak of wildfires through prescribed burns that minimized the buildup of brush and dead trees that could easily catch fire. As the US migrated west, they brought western policies and prescribed burns were less and less common, this has led to an increase of flammable brush available and fires that easily become out of control. Indigenous people have made arguments for bringing back these prescribed burns that would serve as a mitigation technique for wildfires as the climate changes. We can apply these ideals to the classroom. The need for the highest rungs of the university system to have control and domination in the classroom is negatively affecting students. Students, teachers, and lower administrators have made arguments that policies that have these types of impact are problematic to the facilitation of learning, but because they are in a less powerful position their arguments are ignored, even though they are the ones with the experience and expertise.