

Tufts – Intro to Digital Humanities – Spring 2026

1. SYLLABUS

1.a. Introduction to Digital Humanities - Tufts University, Spring 2026



1.b. Details

- Time: M 1:30pm to 4pm
- Location: Eaton Hall 273
- Instructor: Charles Pletcher (charles.pletcher@tufts.edu)
- Instructor Office Hours: M 11am to 1pm or by appointment: <https://cal.com/pletcher>
- Teaching Assistant: Matt Smith (matt_j.smith@tufts.edu)
- Teaching Assistant Office Hours: TBD

1.c. Prerequisites

None

1.d. Description

In a recent article in the *New Yorker*, Princeton professor D. Graham Burnett observes, “But to be human is not to have answers. It is to have *questions* — and to live with them. The machines can’t do that for us. Not now, not ever” (“Will the Humanities Survive Artificial Intelligence?”, April 26, 2025). For us to grapple with what “the machines” mean to us — or, in bleaker terms, what business-types want artificial intelligence (AI) to mean for their bottom lines — we must first understand the limits of what the machines can do.

This course explores the so-called “digital humanities” with a view towards the role of computational methods, including AI, in the humanistic disciplines. This exploration will entail learning to view textual and material objects of study from new angles, but it also involves learning how to scrutinize each angle of interpretation.

Beginning with workshops on textual encoding, students will gain exposure to diverse disciplines at the intersection of data science and the humanities, from

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to Natural Language Processing (NLP), generative art and music, and network analysis.

Students will gain familiarity with the Python programming language, as well as tools like Voyant, TEI XML, ArcGIS, and Gephi. Through readings ranging from antiquity to the present, students will learn about the history of the digital humanities and engage in code criticism.

Assessments include weekly quizzes or discussion posts, collaborative projects, and a final cumulative project of each student's design.

1.e. Learning objectives

Successfully completing this course will equip students to

1. Explain what the digital humanities are and how they relate to other forms of humanities research;
2. Write and execute basic Python scripts;
3. Pre-process a text/corpus in preparation for natural language processing;
4. Parse complex data structures such as Python dictionaries and Pandas data frames;
5. Apply digital methodologies of various kinds to humanities related data;
6. Evaluate the methodologies and results of digital humanities projects.

1.f. Textbooks

1.f.i. Required:

(These are all either open-access or available through the Tufts Library's digital subscriptions.)

- William Mattingly. *Introduction to Python for Humanists*. 2022. <https://python-textbook.pythongumanities.com/>
- James O'Sullivan, ed. *The Bloomsbury Handbook to the Digital Humanities*. Bloomsbury, 2022.
- Plato. *Statesman. Philebus. Ion*. Translated by Harold North Fowler, W. R. M. Lamb. Loeb Classical Library 164. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925.<https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL164/1925/volume.xml>

1.f.ii. Recommended:

- Dennis Yi Tenen. *Literary Theory for Robots: How Computers Learned to Write*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2024.

Other readings will be provided through the course website.

1.g. Schedule

See the file located at [schedule.md](#) for the most up-to-date list of assignments.

1.h. Grading

We will be using specifications grading for this class. This means that your final grade is determined by the number assignments that you complete *at an acceptable*

level. You don't need to knock every assignment out of the park, but your submissions should show genuine effort and an attempt to understand the material.

Pluses and minuses will be determined by attendance, participation, and effort. The maximum grade in this class is an A (i.e., there is no A+).

1.h.i. *A-range grades:*

- 6/6 Reading Responses (See [week-1/homework.md](#) for instructions.)
- 4/4 assigned labs (TEI Lab, Voyant Lab, Programming Historian Labs 1 and 2)
- 2/2 Additional Programming Historian Lessons
- 1/1 Final Project

1.h.ii. *B-range grades:*

- 4/6 Reading Responses (See [week-1/homework.md](#) for instructions.)
- 3/4 assigned labs (TEI Lab, Voyant Lab, Programming Historian Labs 1 and 2)
- 1/2 Additional Programming Historian Lessons
- 1/1 Final Project

1.h.iii. *C-range grades:*

- 3/6 Reading Responses (See [week-1/homework.md](#) for instructions.)
- 2/4 assigned labs (TEI Lab, Voyant Lab, Programming Historian Labs 1 and 2)
- 0/2 Additional Programming Historian Lessons
- 0/1 Final Project

1.h.iv. *D-range grades:*

- 2/6 Reading Responses (See [week-1/homework.md](#) for instructions.)
- 0/4 assigned labs (TEI Lab, Voyant Lab, Programming Historian Labs 1 and 2)
- 0/2 Additional Programming Historian Lessons
- 0/1 Final Project
- Frequent unexcused absences

1.h.v. *Failing grades:*

- 0/6 Reading Responses (See [week-1/homework.md](#) for instructions.)
- 0/4 assigned labs (TEI Lab, Voyant Lab, Programming Historian Labs 1 and 2)
- 0/2 Additional Programming Historian Lessons
- 0/1 Final Project
- Numerous unexcused absences

1.i. *Attendance and participation*

As we only meet once a week, missing even one class could leave you far behind. Although much of the material will be posted online, class time will be used to troubleshoot, debug, and debrief (read: “vent about how hard programming is”).

Obviously emergencies happen, and everyone is allowed one (1) unexcused absence. Further unexcused absences will result in a deduction of half a letter grade *from your final grade*.

Excused absences are easy to obtain: please just give me as much notice as possible. (I try to keep track of religious holidays, but a heads-up is always appreciated.)

1.i.i. *Reading Responses:*

A reading response is a 1- to 2-page paper on the readings for a given week. (You may also reference previous readings.) There is no explicit prompt, but your response should formulate an argument and have a thesis statement that pertains to the readings. You might argue with or against them — the important thing is to use this response as a space to think.

Nota bene: You *may* use generative AI for this assignment, but you should not use it to write for you. You might use ChatGPT or Claude, for example, to formulate ideas or to discuss your argument and/or thesis statement.

You are not *expected* to use AI.

If you choose to use AI, you *must* cite it in accordance with the statement in the syllabus, and you must provide a printout of everything generated by the model that pertains to this assignment. Failure to do so will result in an automatic failure of this assignment.

Remember, these models make mistakes. It probably won't be able to cite the readings accurately, for example. Use them as tools, not as replacements for your own thinking.

1.i.ii. *Labs:*

We will start a lab in class approximately every other week; the lab will be due at 11:59 p.m. following the next class.

Each lab will also ask you to write a short but detailed reflection on your process and what you have learned. These short essays are meant to help you as you decide on your midterm and final projects.

Think of the labs as the final project in miniature. These are opportunities for you to experiment with a methodology or take the next logical steps with a lab. If one works, take the project even further for the final; if it doesn't, the final project gives you a mulligan. **Null results are valid here.**

1.i.iii. *Final project:*

The final project is a chance for you to demonstrate your mastery over some aspect of digital humanities that we have covered during the semester. Start thinking early about what experiments you might want to run or what tools/resources you might want to build for your final project, and feel free to send me an email or come to office hours as soon as you have ideas.

You might choose to embark on an experiment of your own design, or you might instead write a *Programming Historian*-style lesson.

1.j. Statement on AI

(Adapted from “[Artificial Intelligence](#)” by the Tufts’ Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching)

In this class, we will adhere to the following guidelines regarding the use of generative artificial intelligence (GAI):

1. **NEVER** submit AI-generated work as your own. To do so is considered a violation of Tufts’ [Academic Integrity Policy] (<https://students.tufts.edu/community-standards/academic-integrity/academic-integrity-overview>).
2. Familiarize yourself with the limitations of GAI tools. These tools all come with inherent biases, and they all make mistakes. Be aware that no matter how “confident” the AI seems, it does not actually “know” anything.
3. Cite all uses of AI. See suggestions from the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) and the [MLA](#).
4. In addition to citation, please identify *how* the GAI contributed to your work. (Your explanation need not be more than a sentence or two.)
5. If have any questions, please contact me by email, during office hours, or in class.

1.k. Policies

1.k.i. Attendance:

Emergencies arise. Everyone is permitted one unexcused absence. If you will need to miss additional classes, please let me know as soon as possible.

Each subsequent unexcused absence will result in a deduction of half a letter grade from your final grade (i.e., an A will become an A-, an A- will become a B+, etc.).

You are responsible for catching up on any work that you have missed, either by coming to office hours or working with a classmate. As a rule, I will not share lecture notes outside of what is already available on the course website.

1.k.ii. Food and drink:

Please eat only during breaks. (We’ll have one about halfway through each class.)

Otherwise, please stay hydrated.

1.k.iii. Sharing:

This course is designed for everyone to feel comfortable participating in discussion, asking questions, learning, and facilitating the learning of others. In order for that atmosphere to be maintained, the recordings of our conversations will only be shared with the enrolled students in the class (not posted publicly) and it is prohibited for any of us who have access to the video to share it outside the course. Similarly, I have specifically designed the exams, handouts, and lectures for the people who are enrolled in the course this term and those may not be shared outside this course. All

of this content is freely available on GitHub under a Creative Commons license — attribution is all that is required.

1.l. Resources

1.l.i. Religious accommodations:

Tufts University faculty, staff, and administration highly value and acknowledge the religious diversity of its student body. Students seeking religious accommodations related to their holy days are encouraged to collaborate with faculty to make arrangements during the first week of each semester. Consult the [Multifaith Calendar](#) for upcoming holidays, links to the University Religious Accommodations Policy, and members of the University Chaplaincy who are available to respond to questions on religious observances.

1.l.ii. Accommodations for students with disabilities:

Tufts is committed to providing equal access and support to all qualified students through the provision of reasonable accommodations. If you have a disability that requires reasonable accommodations, contact the StAAR Center at StaarCenter@tufts.edu or 617-627-4539. Please be aware that accommodations cannot be enacted retroactively, making timeliness a critical aspect for their provision.

1.l.iii. Academic support at the StAAR Center:

The StAAR Center offers a variety of FREE resources to all students. Students may make an appointment to work on any writing-related project or assignment, attend subject tutoring in a variety of disciplines, or meet with an academic coach to hone skills like time management and navigating procrastination. Students can make an appointment for any of these services by visiting <https://students.tufts.edu/staar-center>.

1.l.iv. Student support, including mental health:

As a student, there may be times when personal stressors or difficulties interfere with your academic performance or well-being. The Dean of Student Affairs Office offers support and care to undergraduates and graduate students who are experiencing difficulties, and can also aid faculty in their work with students. In addition, through Tufts' Counseling and Mental Health Service (CMHS) students can access mental health support 24/7, and they can provide information on additional resources. CMHS also provides confidential consultation, brief counseling, and urgent care at no cost for all Tufts undergraduates as well as for graduate students who have paid the student health fee. To make an appointment, call 617-627-3360. Please visit the CMHS website: <http://go.tufts.edu/Counseling> to learn more about their services and resources.

2. COURSE SCHEDULE

2.a. *Intro to Digital Humanities – Spring 2026 – Course Schedule*

2.a.i. Abbreviations:

- BHDH: *The Bloomsbury Handbook to the Digital Humanities*, ed. O’Sullivan, 2022.
- PyHum: *Python for Humanists*, William Mattingly, 2022. <https://python-textbook.pythonhumanities.com/>

2.a.ii. 1. Week 1 – January 21:

- Introductions
- Syllabus
- Plato’s *Ion*
- Text “encoding” exercise: Mark up as many pages of the *Ion* by hand as you can. (We will discuss details in class.) What features are important to emphasize? How do you want to identify different elements of the text?

Week 1 – Homework:

- O’Sullivan, James. “Introduction: Reconsidering the Present and Future of the Digital Humanities.” (BHDH pp. 1–4)
- Drucker, Johanna. “Normative Digital Humanities.” (BHDH pp. 7–18)
- Hayles, N Katherine. “Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis.” *Poetics Today* 25, no. 1 (2004): 67–90.
- **Bring to class next time:** Reading response. See [week-1/homework.md](#) for instructions.

2.a.iii. 2. Week 2 – January 26:

- Visit to Special Collections (Tisch 103)
- Vaughan, Nicolás. 2025. “Introduction to Encoding Texts in TEI (Part 1).” *Programming Historian*. <https://programminghistorian.org/en/lessons/encoding-texts-tei-1>
- TEI Lab

Week 2 – Homework:

- [TEI Lab](#)
- TEI Consortium, “A Gentle Introduction to XML.” <https://tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/SG.html>
- Buzzetti, Dino. 2002. [“Digital Representation and the Textual Model.”](#)
- Optional: MLA, *Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities*, “Annotation”

2.a.iv. 3. Week 3 – February 2:

- Byszuk, Joanna. “On Computers in Text Analysis.” (BHDH pp. 159–168)
- Introduction to Voyant: <https://voyant-tools.org/docs/tutorial-tutorial.html>
 - ▶ Assembling a corpus

- ▶ Adding to a corpus
- ▶ Distant reading

Week 3 – Homework:

- Moretti, Franco. 2003. “Graphs, Maps, Trees – 1.” *New Left Review* 24: 67–93. [Canvas]
- Schofield, Alexandra. “The Possibilities and Limitations of Natural Language Processing for the Humanities.” (BHDH pp. 169–178)
- Bring to class next time: Prepare a reading response — use the instructions from [./Week 1](#) as a guide.

2.a.v. 4. Week 4 – February 9:

- Discussion: How are we meant to read *with* computers? What kinds of critical practices does such reading enable?
- Torre, Silvia Gutiérrez de la. “Corpus Analysis with Voyant Tools.” Translated by Eime Javier Cisneros Brito and Alberto Santiago Martínez. Programming Historian, no. 14 (June 2025). Torre (2025).
- [Voyant Lab](#)

Week 4 – Homework:

- [Voyant Lab](#)
- Moretti, Franco. 2004. “Graphs, Maps, Trees - 2.” *New Left Review*, March 31, 79–103. Moretti (2004).

2.a.vi. 5. Week 5 – February 19:

- Discussion: What do you make of Moretti’s argument for literary study? How do “graphs” and “maps” create space for distant reading?
- Introduction to Python
 - ▶ Environment setup
 - ▶ Using Jupyter Notebooks

Week 5 – Homework:

- Dombroski, Quinn. “Does Coding Matter for Doing Digital Humanities?” (BHDH pp. 137–146)
- Da, Nan Z. “The Computational Case against Computational Literary Studies.” *Critical Inquiry* 45, no. 3 (2019): 601–39. Da (2019).
- Barrett, Paul. “Unjust Readings: Against the New New Criticism.” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (2025). <https://dhq.digitalhumanities.org/vol/19/1/000764/000764.html>
- Bring to class next time: Prepare a reading response — use the instructions from [Week 1](#) as a guide.

2.a.vii. 6. Week 6 – February 23:

- In-class reading: Selections from Plato’s *Phaedrus*

- Discussion: How does AI shape our access to information? In what ways has it changed our epistemological environment? Can we reclaim anything that has been lost?
- PyHum 1 (The Basics of Python)

Week 6 – Homework:

- Eve, Martin Paul. “Open Access in the Humanities Disciplines.” (BHDH pp. 223–232)
- Egan, Patrick and Órla Murphy. “Sharing as CARE and FAIR in the Digital Humanities.” (BHDH pp. 267–272)
- Alvarado, Rafael. “Datawork and the Future of Digital Humanities.” (BHDH pp. 361–372)
- Finish setting up VS Code and PyHum 1
- Bring to class next time: Prepare a reading response — use the instructions from [Week 1](#) as a guide.

2.a.viii. 7. *Week 7 – March 2:*

- GIS Lab led by Carolyn Talmadge

2.a.ix. *Week 7 – Homework:*

Nota bene: From here on, the readings are meant to help you become more acquainted with what kinds of projects digital humanities practitioners undertake, rather than simply providing background on the field.

- Finish GIS Lab
- Toth, Gabor Mihaly. “Women in Early Modern Handwritten News: Random Walks and Semantic Wanderings in the Medici Archive.” *Journal of Digital History* 3, no. 2 (2024). Toth (2024)
- Hicks, Michael Townsen, James Humphries, and Joe Slater. “ChatGPT Is Bullshit.” *Ethics and Information Technology* 26, no. 2 (2024). Hicks et al. (2024)
- Bring to class next time: Prepare a reading response — use the instructions from [Week 1](#) as a guide.

2.a.x. 8. *Week 8 – March 9:*

- Python environment troubleshooting
- Programming Historian Lab 1 setup and debugging
- PyHum 2 (Data Analysis with Pandas)

Week 8 – Homework:

- [Programming Historian Lab 1](#)

2.a.xi. 9. *Week 9 – March 23:*

- Python debugging
- PyHum 2 (Data Analysis with Pandas)

Week 9 – Homework:

- Herrmann, J Berenike. “Tool Criticism in Practice. On Methods, Tools and Aims of Computational Literary Studies.” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (2023).
- Kemman, Max. “Tool Criticism through Playful Digital Humanities Pedagogy.” (BHDH pp. 287–294)
- Sichani, Anna-Maria. “Embracing Decline in Digital Scholarship beyond Sustainability.” (BHDH pp. 317–324)
- Bring to class next time: Prepare a reading response — use the instructions from [Week 1](#) as a guide.

2.a.xii. 10. *Week 10 – March 30:*

- PyHum 3 (Natural Language Processing with ~~spaCy~~ Stanza)
- Think back to what you were able to accomplish with Voyant. What features from Voyant would you like to implement on your own?

Week 10 – Homework:

- [Programming Historian Lab 2](#)
- Potential follow-up lesson: <https://programminghistorian.org/en/lessons/clustering-visualizing-word-embeddings>

2.a.xiii. 11. *Week 11 – April 6:*

- Python troubleshooting
- PyHum 4 (Other Applications of Python)
- PyHum 5 (Designing an Application with Streamlit)

Week 11 – Homework:

- Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn. Schocken Books, 1969.
- Berry, David M. “AI, Ethics, and Digital Humanities.” (BHDH pp. 445–458)
- Allen, Graham and Jennifer Debie. “Digital Humanities in the Age of Extinction.” (BHDH pp. 459–465)

2.a.xiv. 12. *Week 12 – April 13:*

- In-class work and feedback on final projects

2.a.xv. 13. *Week 13 – April 27:*

- In-class work and feedback on final projects

2.a.xvi. *May 1 – Final Projects Due:*

3. LAB RUBRIC

For the purposes of specification grading, a passing lab generally falls the A or B range. A C-range lab can be revised and resubmitted once for regrading.

3.a. *The A Range*

A lab in the A range is mostly free from grammar and spelling mistakes. It is structured in a logical and easy-to-follow format, using visual aids where appropriate. It not only addresses the problems and questions established in the lab's instructions, but it also offers new questions or avenues of inquiry and makes an attempt to answer them. Most importantly, an A-range lab reflects on the process of inquiry and/or the methodology that was deployed to complete the lab.

3.b. *The B Range*

A B-range lab might have occasional grammar and spelling mistakes, but it remains easy to understand. It rises the challenge of the questions posed by the lab's instructions, but it fails to reflect meaningfully on the methodology or scientific process. It might also come up short in its attempts to identify new questions or avenues of inquiry, or it might not establish a strong connection between its proposed follow-up questions and the actual work that was completed.

3.c. *The C Range*

A lab in the C range is occasionally difficult to read due to grammar and/or spelling mistakes. It struggles with the basic tasks in the lab's instructions, and it makes little or no attempt to identify meaningful follow-up questions or to reflect on the methods and process that led to its results. The results might be incomplete or incompletely explained. In general, while the lab can be said to have been "completed" in a basic sense, the submission also shows evidence of a lack of effort.

3.d. *The D and F Range*

Labs in this range fail to meet the most basic criteria for submission.

REFERENCES

- Da, N. Z. (2019). The Computational Case against Computational Literary Studies. *Critical Inquiry*, 45(3), 601–639. <https://doi.org/10.1086/702594>
- Hicks, M. T., Humphries, J., & Slater, J. (2024). ChatGPT is bullshit. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 26(2). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-024-09775-5>
- Moretti, F. (2004). Graphs, Maps, Trees - 2. *New Left Review*, 79–103. <https://doi.org/10.64590/5kk>
- Torre, S. G. D. I. (2025). Corpus Analysis with Voyant Tools. *Programming Historian*, 14. https://doi.org/10.46430/phen_0128
- Toth, G. M. (2024). Women in Early Modern Handwritten News: Random Walks and Semantic Wanderings in the Medici Archive. *Journal of Digital History*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.1515/jdh-2023-0010>