

Introduction:

Alas, with Module III we have finally reached the end of the coursework and semester!

Module III provided excellent grounds to incorporate the knowledge acquired and tasks completed (or at the very least attempted) over the course of the past two modules, and brings them full circle - allowing for a much more academic-oriented view of digital archaeology, forcing us to ponder over the uses and diverse frameworks that come with this new 'sub field' of archaeology - and the implications that may come with it.

Module III was a great way to end off the semester, and hopefully throughout the course of this (final) consolidation doc, I will be able to express my greater appreciation for the field of digital archaeology, and the 'wins' and 'fails' which have led me to this point, alongside my personal views regarding the conception and usage of digital archaeology.

Wins:

Now when examining the 'wins' I've had over the course of Module III, a stark parallel is drawn with the other modules - that being the preference to connoting parallels in regard to the readings, rather than the tasks handed out. Now, this course was very 'experimental' in it's modules - in that, one was given an enormous amount of freedom to pursue what task/experiment one wished to undertake for that week and not be academically reprimanded for failure to complete what one was not able to finish. Now this provided a much-needed safety net for me, as much of the technological aspect of the course was completely new to me - I'm a Liberal Arts student, whose only prior exposure to coding came in the rants and complaints of my Computer Science-majoring friends. As such, I stuck to the academic aspect quite-heavily and that juxtaposition to the failings of the weekly tasks (in which, I'd never get past the first task in-depth) only amplified the gratification I felt in the readings.

However, I digress...

I will (*once again*) state that the deep interest and parallels drawn from the readings of Module III have been the primary 'win' of this module. Diving more specifically into this, I would consider the introduction to the discourse of archaeological context in regard to databases and the use of wider archaeological resources, rather than the traditional ones that we are so used to. A common theme throughout the course of this semester has been acknowledging the knowing (or even unknowing) obstacles set in place, which prevent an equitable distribution of archaeological

knowledge, resources, and materials. Digital archaeology is a modern form of archaeology which very clearly gives aid in providing communities and groups these assets, who would never otherwise be able to access. However, with this newfound 'free expression' (for lack of a better phrase) of these sources... the context upon which they are relative to is **often lost**. Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein speak of this fondly. They argue that despite archaeological data and databases becoming increasingly open-access in and available in the public domain, that comes with its own share of issues, stating, "*The issue is that much of the data downloaded from web portals and APIs comes without context or metadata. If you are lucky you might get a paragraph about where the data are from or a data dictionary that describes what each column in a spreadsheet means.... And context becomes extra-complicated when poor data documentation is accompanied by the kind of marketing hype we see from GDELT or other Big Dick Data projects.*¹". Now, it was interesting to note that my stance on the such matter matched differently to that of my peers, with one Hypothesis user, 'CurtainMaster', arguing that despite a lack of transparency negatively affecting proper interpretation of data, the fact that this information was now readily available was, stating, "*I find that even if they only report media reports, it's still a good source of data. The problem is their lack of transparency. They should be clear about what their data means in order to avoid misinterpretations.*" Now this was an interesting perspective to pose, and forced me to look into the deeper issue of availability - if a fellow peer found that *at least receiving information was a plus*, then the availability of such information must be scarce to begin with. And though 'CurtainMaster' had put out an interesting rhetoric on the discourse at hand, it was difficult for me to digest that statement wholeheartedly - however, there were many other annotations which I could! 'CRussell550' in particular brought up an interesting point regarding the lack of context often provided by mainstream and public-access resources, as they state:

"This describes a cycle of misinformation/misrepresentation being circulated in mainstream institutions and media that is wrongly taken at face value. People trust in mainstream information far too easily, especially when it comes to things they think are 100% reliable. For example, many people fail to recognize how prevalent sensationalism is in news broadcasts, not realizing that viewership and profits are often prioritized over authenticity. As D'Ignazio and Klein remind us, there is lots of information, particularly in regards to marginalized cultures, that is overlooked and misunderstood by mainstream institutions, which proliferates widespread ignorance."

¹ D'Ignazio, C., & Klein, L. (2018). Chapter Five: *The Numbers Don't Speak for Themselves*. In *Data Feminism*. <https://mitpressonpubpub.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/6ui5n4vo>

'CRussell's words resonated quite well with me, and forced me to look back on the very first few weeks of the course itself, in which discussions regarding the inclusion of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ perspectives were heavily debated. And it is really exciting to see the stark parallels such rhetoric I can draw to the articles read during the beginning of the course! Elizabeth Bollwerk (from the scholarly article posted in week 1) exemplifies this brilliantly, in which the author argues that data of cultural groups ***without the inclusion*** of those groups during the research process is often chalk full of intrinsic biases and argues in the favour of co-creation as a reasonable solution to such academic hurdles. Stating; "*digital collaborative projects that include different types of communities, such as indigenous and descendant groups, cannot solely rely on archaeological frameworks for data organization and interpretation if they want to have a substantial impact on the communities they are working with. The challenge lies in incorporating these alternative forms of knowledge into professional artifact catalogs and collections management systems or providing indigenous and aboriginal groups with ways to use the information to create their own resources.*²".

Now, on the topic of specifically Indigenous inclusion, we learn throughout the module that there are real life examples of this! It was quite a reward when drawing these parallels to come across in a real-life example - as the majority of discourse consumed up until this point had incorporated theoretical frameworks for inclusion. Claire Hall discusses this in her scholarly article discussing an archaeological framework the Maori had invented to aide in primary distribution of their culture through an archaeological (and digital) lens. It is interesting to see how much a framework exists and is maintained! However, despite this, there is still a valid amount of reluctance to immediately accept this framework as the go-to process in utilizing the voices of marginalized communities. Such a reluctance is evident in my peers as well, as they argue for transparency in ensuring the voices of BIPOC groups are truly heard. This sentiment is best exemplified in 'TheGoldenFighter's annotation in which they state that an equal distribution of power (if not having these marginalized groups control much of the cultural narrative completely) must be complied with to ensure there is not an interference of Western (and oftentimes imperialistic) bias, stating, "*We must be careful that the mixing does not turn into the pre-existing power dynamics. Indigenous voices have been historically and globally silenced, so when mixing, we must ensure that we are adhering to a truly collaborative effort, and maintain an equal or more than equal power relationship. This relationship must favour Indigenous voices, traditions, and culture.*".

² Bollwerk, Elizabeth. "Co-Creation's Role in Digital Public Archaeology." *Advances in Archaeological Practice* 3, no. 3 (2015): 223–34. doi:10.7183/2326-3768.3.3.223.

Fails:

Now, as I had (briefly) aforementioned the word ‘fail’ was a difficult one for me to digest when responding to the prompts of the Consolidation docs and weekly logs/journals. It posed an uneasy feeling within me - and would oftentimes be the very last section of the documents that I would work on. Perhaps this speaks to the greater culture surrounding the fear of failure that has been implicitly ingrained in my mind as a young student. Interestingly enough, I came to find out that Dr. Graham wrote an *entire* book on the matter - *Failing Gloriously and Other Essays*. Though I was not able to acquire a copy of the book, there were numerous interviews and talks Graham had conducted discussing the theme and contents of his book. Graham discusses his avoidance to utilize the word ‘fail’ - explaining that it is the majority of the time used in a negative connotation, rather in a learning one. Such a sentiment was mellowly introduced to me during feedback for Consolidation I, in which Graham encouraged that, “*Your feelings of failure are very valid, but the best part about this course is that failure is considered a win. When something does not work out how you wanted you go digging for answers on what to do and the more you do that, the more you learn!*”³.

However, that being said... discussing one’s “failures” certainly aides in comprehending them further, and that is what my goal is in this section.

Now, a common recurrence within my “fails” section in my -previous docs/logs/consolidations came in the form of technological issues. I have never been the most “tech-savy” person, and despite my willingness to give it all a good shot... I’ve never quite made it out on top. My most compelling “fail” this module was also, ironically, the one that I didn’t **need to do**. From Week 10, I decided to attempt to create a Research Compendium of my own, and utilized the Online R Studio. Needless to say... that task came with a lot of challenges. First and foremost, being the lack of executable code that I had encountered. I understood when undertaking the task that it was quite complicated, as outlined in Graham’s discord message on Nov 22/2021 - explaining the numerous dependencies at play. That still didn’t deter me, and I went about attempting to slowly (and carefully) dissect the code and piece it together.

All to no, avail.

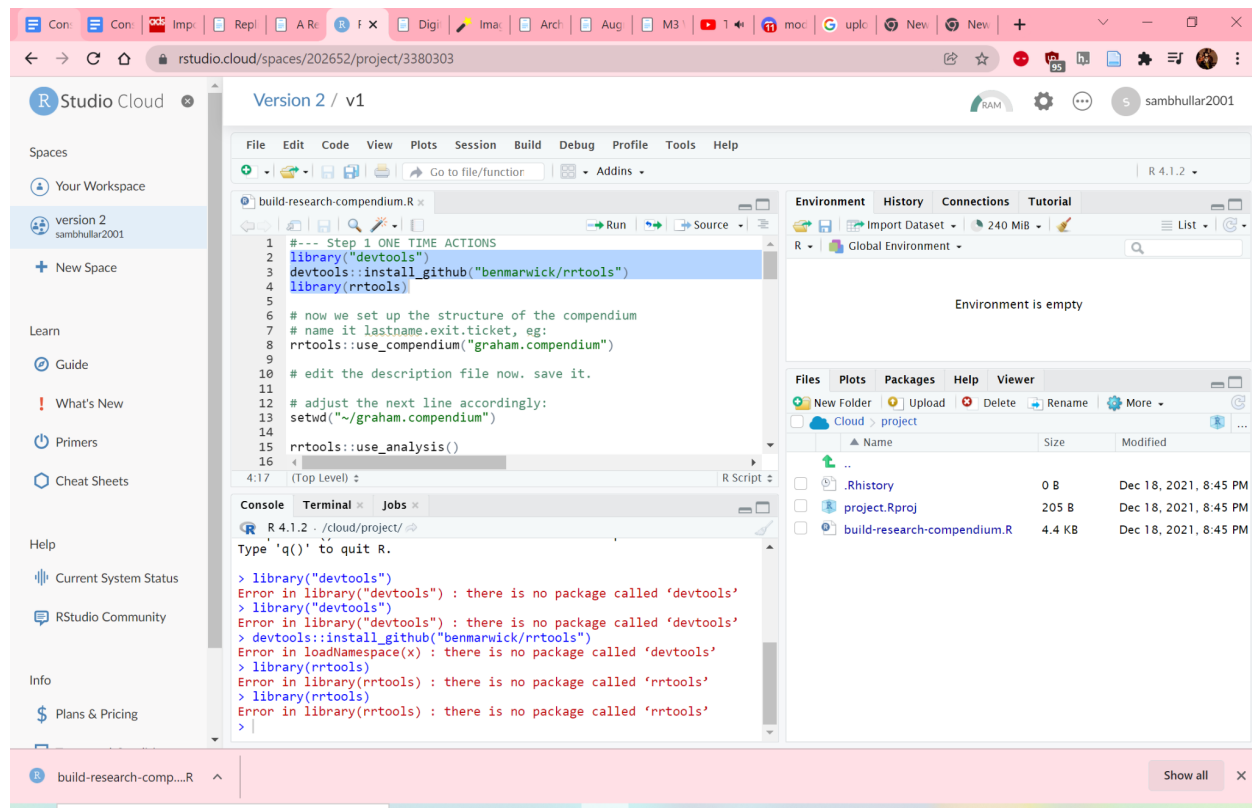
³ Consolidation I feedback, via e-mail (10/13/2021)

While, I had downloaded the linkable R code just fine into the online R studio... DOING ANYTHING WITH IT, was another problem by itself.

When I attempted to follow the orders listed in the code, beginning with:

```
library("devtools")
devtools::install_github("benmarwick/rrtools")
library(rrtools)
```

I was greeted with a lovely, red error message as a present - **Error in library(rrtools) : there is no package called 'rrtools'** .



As visible in the screenshot above, I had attempted to execute the code a few times... and for the life of me just could not understand WHY it wasn't working! I had glossed over the Discord to see if I missed any more details regarding this portion of the week's task and found nothing of use! I had actually created several "blank files" (re-downloading the R file, and starting again in hopes that perhaps I had not followed the downloading process well enough), which is why the file in the image above is labelled as 'v2'. The first bit of task was merely downloading the code and the packages that came along with it - all a series of mouse-clicks, which is why I'm a bit perplexed as to why there are missing files?

Now this “fail” was a bit more compelling for me, for no other reason than because I **chose** to fail in it. I understand that it might not seem like much of a sentiment to write about, but the failures that I had written about before this were all forced - I failed in them, because I **had to**... for the sake of learning the course, and for the sake for my grade. This task was completely optional, and to an extent not encouraged by Graham as he argued that “it’ll take more time than it’s worth to try to complete it.”⁴. And to “fail” in a task such as this, was almost prideful.

Implications of Digital Archaeology

Now, despite the numerous benefits Digital Archaeology gives (primarily the increasing open-access of archaeological records and information), such a power can be used in a negative manner - and poses serious implications for different groups of individuals. As discussed within Module 3 itself, **context matters**. Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren Klein had already made it clear that data without context (no matter how “great” it may be) will always be intrinsically skewed! I believe such a notion can be applied to the broader archaeological community as well! Yes, digital archaeology is needed to broaden the horizons of the field, and allow for information to reach communities and demographics who would otherwise never be able to attain such data. **However**, I strongly believe that a traditional framework is required for one to understand the data and values that come into play - one must understand the fundamentals of archaeology and the theory that is the bedrock of the field. Displaying such data to communities or demographics who do not have this prior knowledge is bound to bring misinterpretation of publicly-available data - the data is **freely available**, yes, but what **good** is that **availability** if one does not possess the skill-set to utilize it?

Furthermore, I believe that “unmonitored data” within digital archaeology can actually **harm** the field rather than aide it. Now, a pro regarding the concept of digital archaeology would be that **anyone** would be able to share their data to people around the world! Now, while that is important, I also believe that such a notion can cause much harm. ‘JaredLoyer’ explains this best in their annotation (and while they arguing specifically in regards to ‘governments and states’, their argument can also be used in a broader manner), stating, *“The author asks some excellent questions here and I have personally wondered how the data produced by governments is verified or validated. Especially when outside contractors are used to acquire the information it devotes a certain level of trust from the viewer of the data to not only the government, but also to the chosen contractor. I’m therefore quite skeptical about individual figures when there are no other supporting numbers or data sets to confirm the general context of the data*

⁴ @drgraham via Discord, Nov 22/2021

set. This is due to the manipulation and corruption many governments have been known to participate in.". Such is the reason why peer-reviewed work is highly esteemed in an academic setting. When students are asked to seek data and scholarly information, it is Research 101 to utilize information that has been **peer-reviewed** - how do the dynamics change with digital archaeology? Will such data be regarded at the same standard as "traditionally" collected data? If not, why should underprivileged communities be given tools that are not at the same academic level as found in standard academic institutions? In other words, would digital archeology just become another facet of the elitism that is plaguing the field?

All in all, there are NUMEROUS implications to ponder over - and personally, though digital archaeology opens many doorways for researchers and students alike to get ahold of data and information, I believe it would be better to find ways to promote the traditional archaeological framework and integrate that into low-income demographics.

Feedback:

Now, much of the feedback I had utilized was for the Consolidation doc itself! Kavita was kind enough to provide a large portion of feedback for the Consolidation doc! She most notably explained to stick to 1-2 things I had achieved (or "failed" to) and go in-depth into those; I hope such a methodology has been accurately represented within this Consolidation!

Furthermore, in my lost Consolidation I had expressed the difficulty that came with reading through some of the more technical articles and code-oriented texts. Dr. Graham gave killer advice on how to deal with difficult readings - advising me to, "read like a predator". Read sections of articles which will have the most general information regarding the paper, and not confuse one with abrtiar facts and number - in an email he had given a me a makeshift schematic to read future articles in a ": [abstract -> conclusion] -> [intro -> discussion]" manner. And needless to say, such a method has aided me immensely! It's much easier to delve into an article and not immediately be turned off by it; a problem which I've had before! Furthermore, this method also allows me to pull much better quotations from the articles themselves! I don't know how noticeable it is, but the quotations for this Consolidation doc have been **much longer** than previous iterations - and that is because I thoroughly connected well with the entire passage! I did not have to nitpick to create a certain quote! That being said, I have yet to get to a place where I'll actually **enjoy** reading journal articles, however, I feel it's all baby steps!

Evolution throughout the course...

Now, though I had scattered my personal growth regarding this course throughout the doc, it would be beneficial to address it in one place as well!

The main growth I truly feel is in my approach towards difficult tasks - and the anxiety of failure. Despite my comical lack of any real technological ability... I like to believe that I have at least changed my **outlook** towards such tasks... and I do believe that progress was made! Looking back at the previous journals and logs, and glancing at the notes of the tasks I had attempted earlier on in the semester, I notice that I hid much of my exasperation behind a snarky front (week 3 - notes are a brilliant example of such a tone present in my writing), and re-reading those notes only takes me back to that place. It's much easier to be dismissive of my feelings in hindsight, and argue that I was being a bit over-dramatic about the "fails" - however, in the moment it felt like I was stuck in a deep ditch.

I do see a positive growth - both academically and in terms of spirit! There would be a sense of guilt I'd feel in beginning when I couldn't complete a certain task, and it'd drain me to the point where even if I skipped the task at hand to attempt the next one, I'd go into it with a certain preconceived defeat - as if I knew I wouldn't be able to finish it either. Now, I still feel this acute sense of guilt. However, it is no longer lined with a sense of hopelessness... rather, in the last few weeks of the course, it would only determine me further.