

“Doing History” in the Digital Age: Developing an Undergraduate-Level Syllabus in the Digital Humanities

As part of the requirements of my minor field in history and new media, I have chosen to create an upper-level undergraduate historical research methods class focused on the digital humanities. After six years researching the topic, one might think this a fairly simple task. However, as an emerging field, the digital humanities is something of a moving target. New approaches are always coming up, new software emerging, and the foundational debates about what “the digital humanities” fundamentally means are still being made. Nevertheless, I feel it is essential that methods classes like the one I designed be offered for undergraduate students, for two primary reasons: first, I feel that it is important for students to have a methods course that imparts the digital literacy skills that are a necessary part of critical thinking in the current information environment. For history majors and non-majors without aspirations to seek a higher degree in history, digital humanities presents a whole host of skills that will help them negotiate and thrive in the age of the Internet and ubiquitous computing. Second, I feel that an introduction to the methods and debates of the digital humanities presents an important “leg up” for students who are interested in studying history at a graduate level. However unsettled and nascent the field may appear, the digital humanities are here, and all indications are that they are going to stay with us for the foreseeable future.

In the past few years, the digital humanities has grown in visibility as a field. Where a few years ago, much of the work in the field seemed to be oriented toward defending the very idea of digital work within the humanities, such discussion seems

almost moot at this point. The digital humanities has *arrived*. Perhaps the best illustration of this is a recent series of three blog posts in the New York Times's Opinionator blog by Stanley Fish, a series where the postmodernist Fish (without much apparent sense of irony) was by and large dismissive of what he sees as the newest fad in the humanities.¹ When one of the biggest names in the last major trend in the academy to be described for decades as a "fad" starts dismissing your work as faddish, you know you're doing something right. Another blog post, this one anonymously posted on Tumblr is perhaps as telling: the parody "MLA Jobs" Tumblr account recently included the following post: "The English department at Regional U invites applications for a tenure-track position in the digital humanities. Selected candidate will be responsible for explaining to everyone what "digital humanities" is, and teaching a 4/4 load of composition, literature surveys, and Shakespeare."²

I believe that this satirical job listing highlights several important trends: first, there is a growing anxiety about the growing number of digital humanities positions. As jobs have slowed in the recent economic downturn, an increasing number of digital humanities listings has inspired frustration among recent PhDs who may feel they were not adequately prepared for this shift in vogue by their schools. Departments, on the other hand, seem to be using the digital humanities label instrumentally in the face of

¹ Stanley Fish, "Mind Your P's and B's: The Digital Humanities and Interpretation." *Opinionator*, January 23, 2012. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/23/mind-your-ps-and-bs-the-digital-humanities-and-interpretation/>; Stanley Fish, "The Digital Humanities and the Transcending of Mortality." *Opinionator*, January 9, 2012. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/09/the-digital-humanities-and-the-transcending-of-mortality/>; Stanley Fish, "The Old Order Changeth." *Opinionator*, December 26, 2011. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/26/the-old-order-changeth/>.

² MLA Jobs. "The English Department at Regional U..." *MLA Jobs*, September 19, 2012. <http://mlajobs.tumblr.com/post/31878141471/the-english-department-at-regional-u-invites>.

budget cuts and departmental closures, especially in the humanities and their interdisciplines. When the humanities and liberal arts are the first on the chopping block, a new movement toward the digital humanities might be used almost as a totem against administrators with a bias toward STEM and vocational training: “we incorporate computers,” seems to be the logic, “this is more than just reading books. This is *science*.” Of course, the more traditional courses still must be taught, thus the 4/4 load of composition and Shakespeare.

Finally, the blog is a winking reference to a unique peculiarity of digital humanities scholarship: its propensity to reiterate and debate the very nature of the digital humanities. It would be almost impossible to account for and synthesize all the different articles, blog posts, and conference papers on the subject. “What is (or are) the Digital Humanities...” has become an almost ubiquitous panel topic in humanities, library, and archives conferences in the past few years. Nevertheless, in designing a course on a topic, it is important to define the topic, so I will look at several definitions that I find compelling or important.

Matthew Kirschenbaum has pointed out that the definition found on the Wikipedia page for “digital humanities” is a good start as a working definition.³ That definition as it currently stands—as Wikipedia is inherently fluid—seems fairly solid, despite being quite different from the one Kirshenbaum quotes:

The **digital humanities** is an area of research, teaching, and creation concerned with the intersection of computing and the disciplines of the humanities. Developing from an earlier field called **humanities computing**, today digital humanities embrace a variety of topics ranging from curating online collections to data mining large cultural data sets. Digital Humanities currently incorporates

³ Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, “What Is Digital Humanities and What’s It Doing in English Departments?” *ADE Bulletin* no. 150 (2010), 56.

both digitized and born-digital materials and combines the methodologies from the traditional humanities disciplines... with tools provided by computing (such as data visualisation, information retrieval, data mining, statistics, computational analysis) and digital publishing.⁴

As Kirschenbaum points out, the quality of the definition provided is “not surprising since a glance at the page’s View history tab reveals individuals closely associated with the digital humanities as contributors.”⁵ While focusing on similar practices, the authors of the “Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0” reject the notion of the digital humanities as a field, preferring a definition couched in methodologies and the shifting information environment:

Digital Humanities is not a unified field but an array of convergent practices that explore a universe in which: a) print is no longer the exclusive or the normative medium in which knowledge is produced and/or disseminated; instead, print finds itself absorbed into new, multimedia configurations; and b) digital tools, techniques, and media have altered the production and dissemination of knowledge in the arts, human and social sciences.⁶

Others argue that the digital humanities is almost a misnomer, simply a term for a cohort that acknowledges and interrogates the ways that computers have transformed scholarship. As Alex Reid has argued,

As humanists we all employ computers, the Internet, databases, and so on to teach and research. Today there is really no humanities without digital technologies. We are the digital humanities today, just as we were the print humanities in the last century. In 1980, would anyone have doubted the claim that print technologies and literacies pervade the humanities? Would anyone doubt that today? I would suggest the same is true now of the digital. It's just that we have yet to investigate the implications of that realization.

⁴ “Digital Humanities.” *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, November 25, 2012. http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Digital_humanities&oldid=524860043. Emphasis in the original.

⁵ Kirschenbaum, 56.

⁶ Todd Presner, et al. “The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0.” Accessed December 1, 2012. http://www.humanitiesblast.com/manifesto/Manifesto_V2.pdf.

Video game theorist Ian Bogost agreed, summing it up succinctly: “The digital humanities are just the humanities of the present moment.”⁷ While there is some truth to this analysis, and it may well be the agreed-upon interpretation of the field in the future as technology evolves further and is integrated into the mainstream of humanistic scholarship, I believe that we are not yet at that point. While no scholar is doing work in the humanities in an anachronistic computer-free bubble, the methods and modes of many humanities researchers have not fundamentally shifted within this new information environment. Many use word processors and online journals in a way that, while it does alter workflow, does not fundamentally shift their methodology.

Indeed, a concern with methodology seems to be the greatest uniting factor within the digital humanities. Tom Scheinfeldt of the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media has argued that the digital humanities represents a movement from the humanities’ late-twentieth century fascination with ideology and a return to the nineteenth century emphasis on methodology: “...we are entering a new phase of scholarship that will be dominated not by ideas, but once again by organizing activities, both in terms of organizing knowledge and organizing ourselves and our work..”⁸ At the second The Humanities and Technology Camp (THATCamp) in 2009, Dave Lester suggested a dictum that has since become integral to the ethos of THATCamps as they have become a worldwide phenomenon: “More hack, less yack.” This epigram has become quite popular in the digital humanities community, and is evoked as a

⁷ Ian Bogost, “Getting Real: On the Digital Humanities.” *Bogost.com*. Accessed December 1, 2012. http://www.bogost.com/blog/getting_real.shtml.

⁸ Scheinfeldt, Tom. “Sunset for Ideology, Sunrise for Methodology?” *Found History*, March 13, 2008. <http://www.foundhistory.org/2008/03/13/sunset-for-ideology-sunrise-for-methodology/>.

incitement to focus on doing and making, rather than get bogged down in discussion.

Methods trump ideology.

Yet this ethos of making over critical discourse is not without its detractors. In an introduction to a special section of the inaugural issue of *The Journal of Digital Humanities*, Natalia Cecire argued that the digital humanities was problematically undertheorized. According to Cecire, the rise of critical theory in the academy was a moment where the division of theory and praxis was temporarily undone, when the academy was invested in “how to do things with words.” The hack/yack dichotomy that others in the digital humanities community happily herald and endorse, then, is deeply problematic:

...I am not, for my own part, persuaded that the digital humanities’ epistemology of building is enough of a saving grace to render the hack/yack division a happy fault. My sympathies rest with bell hooks’s insistence that theory can solve problems that urgently need solving, that articulating in words how things work can liberate. I am troubled by the ease with which the epistemology of building occludes and even, through its metaphors, legitimizes digital humanities’ complicity with exploitative postindustrial labor practices, both within the academy and overseas, and I wish to see digital humanities dismantle as well as build things.⁹

I am deeply sympathetic to Cecire’s concerns in this article, but I have to admit that it came to my attention for somewhat narcissistic reasons: Cecire cited my introduction to the crowdsourced volume *Hacking the Academy*. As the physical edition of *Hacking the Academy* had yet to be published, and this was my first citation in a peer-reviewed journal, I was quite excited. I was taken aback to discover, however, that Cecire had cited me as an example of someone that believed that this hack/yack

⁹ Cecire, Natalia. “Introduction: Theory and the Virtues of Digital Humanities.” *Journal of Digital Humanities*, March 9, 2012. <http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-1/introduction-theory-and-the-virtues-of-digital-humanities-by-natalia-cecire/>.

dichotomy was a positive. I realized upon reading Cecire's article that I had not been as clear as I had hoped in my article. I had hoped to explain the meaning of the word "hack" in terms of both making and doing, *as well as* a mode of learning and critically engaging. "Hackers," I argued, "are autodidacts. From the earliest hackers working at large research universities on the first networks to anyone who deserves the term today, **a hacker is a person who looks at systemic knowledge structures and learns about them from making or doing.**"¹⁰ It had not been my intention to valorize "making or doing" at the expense of theory or critical interrogation. Rather, what I had hoped to convey was that "hacking" was a mode of approach that combined the two. Though I did not spell it out as clearly as I could have, I had tried to argue that "hacking," much like Cecire had argued about the interventions of critical theory in the late-twentieth century, was a mode of knowledge production that deconstructs the binary of theory and praxis. It is my contention that "hacking," as it is often used in the digital humanities, is not simply "making and doing," but also an approach to knowledge creation. It is a method-oriented approach to complex systems that critically interrogates those systems by following their internal logic, building off what is good, and rerouting or subverting what is not.¹¹

To me, this is the real meaning and importance of the digital humanities' concern with methodology. I believe that, as we try to understand the world, the critical

¹⁰ Suiter, Tad. "Why 'Hacking'?" In *Hacking the Academy*. (DigitalCultureBooks. University of Michigan Press, 2010) <http://www.digitalculture.org/hacking-the-academy/introductions/#introductions-suiter>. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹ Roger Whitson uses the same quote from me in much the way I intended it, as well as arguing for the continuities between critical theory and "hacking," in this blog post: Roger T. Whitson, "Hacking THATCamp Theory." *Rogerwhitson.net*, October 12, 2011. <http://www.rogerwhitson.net/?p=830>.

interrogation of methodology is just as important as the critical interrogation of culture. If we do not interrogate the modes by which we produce knowledge, we run the risk of misunderstanding the subject of our research, and more dangerously, we risk reifying systems of imperialism, oppression, and injustice by not noticing the blind spots in the tools we use. Given that we have entered a time when computers and software have become a ubiquitous component of humanistic investigation, we must be cognizant of this and try to critically engage with our methods in new ways. Computers and software are incredibly complex systems. In many cases, it is insufficient to simply look at them as black boxes. As we adopt more and more new computer-based methods for humanistic research, we must find new methods of interrogating these tools, and I believe that “hacking”—opening up machines and programs, seeing how they work, and playing around at subverting or improving them—is a valuable tool with which to better understand the implications of these machines that have become a fundamental part of how we do our work.

This concern with the need for critical engagement with methodology is at the center of my course design. The technologies of digital humanities methods are disparate and require a great deal of specialization—nobody in the digital humanities community does it all. It is anomalous in the humanities for this reason: the time and knowledge demands are so great that collaboration is an essential quality in the field. Given the this complexity, it would be unreasonable to expect undergraduate history students without a previous background in digital humanities to fully master the set of skills discussed in the syllabus. Nevertheless, I wanted to, in addition to ensure that students did not simply read about the field. For this reason, the class is divided

between readings-based seminar classes and “lab days,” where students try their hand at a variety of approaches, including visualization tools, photo editing software, editing wikis, and other activities. The final third of the class is in fact primarily lab sessions, as students work on their final project in class, where they can benefit from one another’s assistance and feedback. The overall goal of these lab days is to reduce discomfort with interrogating and playing with new technology, to allow students to get their feet wet with various tools. Lab days are not oriented toward specific achievements—they are not even part of the grading rubric, except as a portion of the participation grade. But they serve an important function.

In terms of evaluation, I have tried to spread out the percentages of the total as much as possible to ensure that no one project or task is overly important. Students will likely find certain ideas, technologies, or approaches much harder than others—this is the nature of the field, and as I stated earlier, nobody in the digital humanities is a master of all skills. For this reason I try to ensure that there is no one point at which a failure to understand or gain command of an idea or tool will be devastating to a student’s grade.

The largest portion of the grade is made up of weekly blog posts. It is my belief that regular low-stakes writing assignments do more for students’ writing and their ability to deal with a complex subject than a large writing assignment. In addition, blogging is a key skill in the digital humanities—as much important discussion happens in blogs and on Twitter as does in peer-reviewed journals. For similar reasons, I require that each student replies to two other students’ blogs every week. The value of blogging as opposed to short-form response papers is that they are designed to have an audience

broader than the instructor. By requiring that students respond to their classmates' blogs, I hope that they will internalize that they are writing for one another as much as for their grade, and use their blog posts to extend the discussion beyond the classroom. Likewise, the participation grade is based not only on in-class participation, but on Twitter use.

Both the blog post requirement and the inclusion of Twitter in the participation grade (which is an above-average 20% of the final grade) are motivated by a desire to foster in the class what Georgetown's Randy Bass and Heidi Elmendorf have described in a recent Teagle Foundation White Paper as "social pedagogy," which they define as

...design approaches for teaching and learning that engage students with what we might call an "authentic audience" (other than the teacher), where the *representation of knowledge* for an audience is absolutely central to the *construction of knowledge* in a course. Social pedagogies build in iterative cycles of engagement with the most difficult material, and through a focus on authentic audience and representation of knowledge for others, help students deepen their understanding of core concepts by engaging in the ways of thinking, practicing, and communicating in a field.¹²

Given the deeply network nature of the digital humanities—while people may disagree on whether it's a field or a set of methodologies or simply the new status quo in the humanities, but most are willing to discuss it as a community of self-identified practitioners¹³—it seemed logical to try to encourage a similar approach among students. The logic behind the supplemental reading presentation is similar: it is an

¹² Bass, Randy, and Heidi Elmendorf. "Designing for Difficulty: Social Pedagogies as a Framework for Course Design." Accessed June 12, 2012. <https://blogs.common.georgetown.edu/bassr/social-pedagogies/>.

¹³ See, for example, Tom Scheinfeldt, "Stuff Digital Humanists Like: Defining Digital Humanities by Its Values." *Found History*, December 10, 2010, <http://www.foundhistory.org/2010/12/02/stuff-digital-humanists-like/>.

attempt to encourage the students to keep one eye outside of the classroom, to the broader community of digital humanities practitioners.

One strategy that I believe is quite helpful in encouraging effective use of social pedagogy is modeling behavior. For this reason, I would plan to blog weekly along with the students, and to participate regularly on the Twitter backchannel. Blogging with students allows an instructor to show by example what constitutes a good blog entry, proper use of hypertext and images when necessary, etc. It also has the advantage of serving as a platform from which the instructor can single out exemplary blog posts, encouraging the students selected and letting the other students know what they should attempt to make their own blog posts look like. I feel that this sort of activity can also level the classroom somewhat, especially if the instructor is willing to explore concepts, tools, or articles that they find particularly difficult. This again can have the effect of emphasizing and modeling that these writings are more than assignments, they are engagement with the community of the class.

The final project is 30% of the final grade, but that is divided among several components. The “elevator pitch” early in the semester is intended to get students thinking about what of their interests might make an interesting project. I would prefer to encourage students to think in terms of subjects they already have some knowledge of, and hopefully have already done some research on, as it would be easier than trying to learn the technical skills while also being concerned with research. A more formal project proposal is due on week nine. As the final project is meant to be a web site that is itself a proposal for a larger digital humanities project, this project proposal allows the instructor to vet the students’ work and make sure that they are all on the right track

before they begin working on the design of the website in earnest. It also ensures that the majority of content creation is done prior to the design and code work. The final project itself is to be essentially a small set of static web pages that outlines a larger digital humanities project. Grading criteria would include design, HTML and CSS standard compliance, functioning links, basic usability, as well as the actual proposal itself, in terms of how it engages with the course materials.

The course is divided into three “modules” of five weeks, each with different but complimentary goals. The first module, “Intro to Digital History and Digital Survival Skills” is oriented toward first giving students an understanding of the subject matter of the course, and then focuses on information literacy skills. The second module, “Approaches in Digital History (Intro to Digital Methods) is organized as a sampler of methodological approaches that attempts to impart in students an understanding of some of the key approaches in Digital History and the Digital Humanities. Finally, the third module, “Design Bootcamp and Final Projects,” is intended to be an intensive, immersive period during which students work both collaboratively and individually on their final projects, gaining some basic understanding of HTML and CSS as well as design principles.

The first week and a half of the class is centered around introducing students to the concept of Digital History. I have tried to select shorter writings and a few videos that orient students in several ways. Melih Bigil’s video “History of the Internet” is included because it is a concise piece that historicizes the development of the Internet, which is an important thing to understand when looking at Digital History, and easy for

younger students especially to overlook, due to its ubiquity. Susan Hockey's "The History of Humanities Computing, from the Blackwell *Companion to the Digital Humanities*, is a fine history of Humanities Computing, and serves as a good context for the current trend of the Digital Humanities. While computer-based approaches to humanistic research are enjoying a current vogue, they in no way sprung fully formed from the heads of current scholars. Michael Wesch's videos are included because of the themes they introduce in terms of the ways that digital (or digitized) information has fundamentally different characteristics and contours than information in previous media. Also, I hope that along with Bigil's video, they evoke for students the multimedia possibilities of web-based communications, and the broadening nature of what "scholarship" entails in our new media environment. Finally, O'Malley and Rosenzweig's "Brave New World or Blind Alley?" is a seminal article that was one of the first to explore the relationship between the Internet and historical work.

In the second "Intro to DH" session, I have selected writings by Chris Forster, John Unsworth, and Matthew Kirschenbaum that reflect the current state of the Digital Humanities generally, which were selected because they are designed as introductions but also point to the fact that the field is still a contested one, the contours of which are still being debated and felt out. I have included Lisa Spiro of NITLE's "Getting Started in the Digital Humanities" because it is—in strictly pragmatic terms—one of the best guides for how one ought to go about beginning to participate in and understand the field. Finally, because seeing the products of DH scholarship is just as important as having an academic understanding of what the field is, I have provided a small sampler of digital history projects, trying to cover a range of topics and interest. The hope here is

that beginning to look at such projects will allow students to start to think critically the field, to look at how projects are succeeding and how they are falling short of the potentials of digital scholarship.

The next four and a half weeks of the module are centered around “Digital Survival Skills.” Given that this is an undergraduate-level course, I felt it was essential to dedicate part of the class to digital literacy skills. As Henry Jenkins has argued, digital literacy is essential for today’s students:

Beyond core literacy, students need research skills. Among other things, they need to know how to access books and articles through a library; to take notes on and integrate secondary sources; to assess the reliability of data; to read maps and charts; to make sense of scientific visualizations; to grasp what kinds of information are being conveyed by various systems of representation; to distinguish between fact and fiction, fact and opinion; and to construct arguments and marshal evidence. If anything, these traditional skills assume even greater importance as students venture beyond collections that have been screened by librarians and into the more open space of the Web. Some of these skills have traditionally been taught by librarians who, in the modern era, are reconceptualizing their role less as curators of bounded collections and more as information facilitators who can help users find what they need, online or offline, and can cultivate good strategies for searching material.¹⁴

Many of the topics in this module, from Wikipedia to social media to copyright and creative commons, can tend to be flashpoints for educators and librarians, especially. In part this controversy is well-deserved. Anecdotal evidence and study after study suggest that students do not have the skills with which to critically interrogate sources found on Google or Wikipedia, and do not understand the nature of their digital footprint on social media. However, there is also a contingent that is constitutionally afraid of change, and there is a great deal of irrational worry that has to do with the displacement of information gatekeepers in the age of the Internet. The goal of the

¹⁴ Henry Jenkins, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 30.

“Digital Survival Skills” module is twofold, then: to give students a crash course on the needed information literacy skills to use these new tools productively and effectively, and also to give them an understanding of the counter-arguments to those status-based fears.

Google and other Internet search engines are both a blessing and a curse for researchers. While it does not index everything on the internet—most notably certain scholarly databases and electronic archives—it is usually the first destination for student searches, and in too many cases, it is the final destination as well.¹⁵ The goal of my “Google-fu” session, then, is to try to give students an enriched understanding of the way that search works—both by instructing them on the rich “walled gardens” of the scholarly databases, which are often not crawled by Google, and by introducing them to tools like Google Scholar that allow them to target searches to scholarly books. In addition, there will be a focus on the evaluation of online sources.

The theme of evaluating online sources comes up in the last week of the module as well, when a solid week is dedicated to Wikipedia and crowdsourcing. Wikipedia is a sort of boogeyman for many academics and librarians, as there are no gatekeepers. However, the “wisdom of crowds” is often quite effective, and many Wikipedia articles are for the most part reliable. Moreover, when inaccuracies are found, they can be

¹⁵ For more on the role of Google in undergraduate web search activities, see: Tara Brabazon, “Won’t Get Googled Again: Searching For An Education.” In *Brave New Classrooms: Democratic Education & the Internet*, edited by Joe Lockard and Mark Pegrum, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007) 153–168; Benita Fabos, “Learning Through Critical Literacy: Why Google Is Not Enough.” In *Brave New Classrooms: Democratic Education & the Internet*, edited by Joe Lockard and Mark Pegrum, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007) 169–185; Jillian R Griffiths and Peter Brophy, “Student Searching Behavior and the Web: Use of Academic Resources and Google.” *Library Trends* 53, no. 4 (Spring 2005): 539–554; Nancy J. Becker, “Google in Perspective: Understanding and Enhancing Student Search Skills.” *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 9, no. 1 (2003): 84–99. doi:10.1080/13614530410001692059.

edited out. A lab day on Wikipedia will focus on the culture and principles of the on-line encyclopedia, the evaluation of information within articles, and the basics of editing and wiki markup. Another pair of classes on “Identity Management” and “The Backchannel” are important because students already have online presences in a variety of social media, but often only learn the principles of identity management and audience through trial and error over time. At the same time, it is a primer on the principles that underlie the social pedagogy goals of the class.

The second module, “Approaches in Digital History (Intro to Digital Methods) is intended to cover a broad swath of digital humanities methods. In many ways, this is the heart of the syllabus. Students have already been asked to suggest a topic for their final project in the form of the “elevator pitch” in week four, and should thus be able to keep their project in the back of their minds as they move through this module, thinking about how the various methodologies might be relevant to their project’s topic. The subjects covered in this module are diverse. The readings and the topics were chosen to give breadth more than depth, as I felt it was important to give students a feeling for the wide range of different digital humanities methods. It is my hope that in the course of this module, every student will find one or two methodological approaches that appeals to them and might complement their research.

There is a session on “Mashups, Remixes, and APIs,” from which I hope students will gain understanding of the ways that the integration and transformation of others’ products—whether code or culture—can be used to create projects that would otherwise be impossible. “TEI and ‘Distant Reading’” is an introduction to markup and text mining. There is a lab day following that on visualization, where students will be

able to work with several visualization tools to look at text in new ways. A class on “GIS, Geodata, and Augmented Reality” deals with the application of GIS data in historical tools, as well as the ways that geodata interlinks with smartphones and ubiquitous computing. The class on “Digital Classrooms” will look at the ways that people in the digital humanities have advocated for the use of technology to transform teaching. And “Libraries, Archives, and Museums in the Digital Age” is a look at some of the exciting ways that non-academic cultural heritage institutions are beginning to adopt new technologies in ways that have deep parallels to the work of academics in the digital humanities. In addition, there are two lab days that are dedicated to topics that I felt were essential to shoehorn in somewhere, though they aren’t specifically “digital humanities” specific. A session on photo editing and digital restoration and another on issues of accessibility were necessary to students’ later work in the third module, and were also just important topics for students to get at least a basic understanding of.

I am particularly excited about the possibilities of the two-day session on gamification and games in the ninth week. In a lab session, students would spend half the class playing *Code Hero*, a video game that teaches Javascript and the Unity 3-D game engine, and half the session working through the first couple lessons of a Javascript guide. The next class, students would come in for a seminar class on gamification and learning games, having read several articles on the topic, and would discuss those readings and their own experience with the two approaches. *Code Hero* is perhaps one of the most exciting educational games I have encountered, as it really teaches you the basics of real, usable coding languages, and does so very quickly. The game is more fun, and takes a learner more quickly to the point where you are doing

something more exciting than “Hello, world,” but it lacks some of the depth and explanation of a guidebook. I am deeply curious about how students might react to the differences between the two.

Having already turned in and received feedback on their written final project proposals at the end of the second module, students should be ready for the final module, “Design Bootcamp and Final Projects.” This is a five-week intensive series of lab classes where students learn some of the basic principles of web design, learn to write (or borrow and modify) code in HTML and CSS. Students will have in-class, hands-on training, first with basic web design principles and sketching out their ideas, then with HTML, and finally with CSS, as we move from design concept to content to style sheets. I have deliberately left this module fairly open, as the schedule would likely need to shift depending on how quickly or slowly students pick up on the various skills. I expect this to be a fairly difficult, rigorous portion of the class for many students, particularly those with limited prior experience with web design. It is only partially a joke when I describe the module as a “bootcamp.” However, I have left a lot of time in the schedule for in-class work, and it is my hope that this will allow for sufficient time to collaborate with other students, pool knowledge, and consult with the instructor.

This syllabus was designed with a few primary learning outcomes in mind: first, I want students to come away with a general understanding of what “the digital humanities” is, and what it does. Second, I want students to come away with increased information literacy skills, and a heightened ability to discern credible online sources from unreliable ones. Third, I would like for students to learn to think critically about research methods, to be able to analyze research techniques and understand their

weaknesses and their strengths—and to be have the skills to chose the appropriate tools and methodologies for their research in the future. And finally, I would like for them to just be more comfortable with new technology, to try to reduce the anxiety of new technology, and get them to a place where they might be more comfortable rolling up their sleeves and hacking away at a technology they encounter in the future that strikes them as interesting or useful. I think that this class would be an excellent introduction for students who are interested in pursuing the digital humanities at a graduate school level, but that these learning outcomes point to the broad applicability of the skills and methods covered in the class, even for those who are not.

Appendix A: Syllabus

HISTORY 3xx: “Doing History” in the Digital Age

Course Description:

An introduction to the major topics and issues in the Digital Humanities for history majors. Topics include gathering and evaluating evidence online, creating scholarship for online consumption, and various computational, social, and web-based approaches that are beginning to transform historical scholarship. Through extensive reading and hands-on practicums, students will gain a familiarity with many of the major trends in digital history, leading to the creation of a website proposal for a major digital history project.

This class is heavily focused on technology, and students are expected to come in with a wide range of technological competencies. For this reason, the class is less focused on the full mastery of individual technologies, and more on providing students with an opportunity to become more familiar with a wide variety of technologies.

Course Requirements:

- *Blogging*— Starting with the second week of class, every student is expected to set up and maintain a **weekly blog** throughout the course. These blogs are a place for you to engage with the readings and the labs, as well as to communicate with your classmates and those outside the class about the materials you encounter. While your blog posts do not need to be long—a few hundred words will often suffice—they are expected to be *sufficiently in-depth to deal with the materials in a thoughtful, complex manner.*

In weeks 2-10, at least three of your blog posts should deal primarily with the assigned readings and viewings, as well as the subsequent discussion, and at least three should deal with topics covered in lab sessions. In weeks 11-14, they should deal with your work on your final project. In addition, you are required to comment on at least two of your classmates’ blog posts, and to state—with a hyperlink—where these comments were made in your own blog post.

Blog posts are to be posted no later than 3pm Friday of each week.

- *Participation*— This class entails a good bit of reading and writing. However, it is designed so that it’s not too much at any given time, assuming you have been keeping up. The class is set up around a concept of social learning, so participation in blogs, over twitter, and in class is very important. **Students who participate and interact the most will find the course requirements much easier than those who do not.**

- *Supplemental Reading Presentation*— Each student will be expected, once in the semester, to find an additional substantial reading or project on the topic of that day’s discussion to present to the group. Students will be responsible for conveying the major points of the article or digital project, and for leading a class discussion on how this article or project relates to, supplements, or problematizes aspects of the week’s readings.
- *Final Projects*— The final project for this class is the creation of a website that outlines an idea for a larger Digital History project. The goal of this project is twofold: first, to demonstrate that you have thought about a historical problem using the DH principles and tools discussed throughout the course, and second, to learn the basics of good web design, how to write compliant HTML and CSS, and to think about how to present an argument on a website. *In addition to the project itself, you will be expected to give a brief “Elevator Pitch” on Week 4, and a 3-to-4 page project proposal on Week 9.*

Evaluation:

Blogging.....	40%
Participation.....	20%
Supplemental Reading Presentation...	10%
Final Project:	
Elevator Pitch.....	5%
Proposal.....	10%
Final Product.....	15%

Course Schedule:

Module 1: Intro to Digital History and Digital Survival Skills

Week 1:

Tuesday:

Intro, syllabus, etc.

Thursday:

Defining DH 1

- Melih Bigil, ["History of the Internet"](#)
- Susan Hockey, [The History of Humanities Computing](#)
- Michael Wesch, [Machine is Us/ing Us](#)
- Michael Wesch, [Information R/evolution](#)
- Michael O'Malley and Roy Rosenzweig, ["Brave New World or Blind Alley? American History on the World Wide Web"](#)

Week 2:

Tuesday:

Defining DH 2

- Chris Forster, "I'm Chris. Where Am I Wrong?"
- John Unsworth, "What's Digital Humanities, and How did it Get Here?"
- Matthew Kirschenbaum, "What Is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?"
- Lisa Spiro, [Getting Started in the Digital Humanities](#)

PROJECTS TO EXPLORE:

(Pick 3)

- [Mapping Du Bois](#)
- [Mapping the City in Film](#)
- [The Seattle Band Map](#)
- [The Bracero History Archive](#)
- [Voices of the Holocaust](#)
- [The Valley of the Shadow - University of Virginia](#)
- [Gulag: Many Days, Many lives](#)
- [The September 11 Digital Archive](#)
- [Mapping the Republic of Letters](#)
- [ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World](#)

Deadline to have a blog set up.

Thursday:

LAB DAY— Google-fu and Zotero

Read Beforehand:

- Nicholas Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid"
- [How to Use Google Search More Effectively](#)
- Joe Barker, "Evaluating Web Pages: Techniques to Apply and Questions to Ask"
- Laura McKenna, [Locked in the Ivory Tower: Why JSTOR Imprisons Academic Research](#)
- Aaron Tay, [How is Google Different from Traditional Library OPACs and Databases?](#)
- Dan Cohen, [Zotero: Social and Semantic Computing for Historical Scholarship](#)
- Amy Cavender, "Getting Started with Zotero"

The first half of this session will be dedicated to learning better search strategies, both in Google and other search engines, as well as within some of the “walled garden” databases. Among other things discussed: boolean searching, Google Books and Google Scholar as discovery tools, keyword selection, and the importance of using multiple search tools.

The second half of the class will be dedicated to learning how to set up and use Zotero, and to beginning to build a shared group bibliography for this class.

Week 3:

Tuesday

Identity management

- Manuel Castellas, ["Why Networks Matter"](#)
- Clay Shirky ["How Social Media Can Make History"](#)
- Bruce Schneier, [Privacy in the Age of Persistence](#)
- Chuck Tryon, ["Why You Should Be on Twitter"](#)
- Shannon McFarland, [Job Seekers Being Asked for Facebook Passwords](#)
- Martin Weller, [The Virtues of Blogging as Scholarly Activity](#)
- Laurel Papworth, [Social Network Identity: Anonymity, Pseudonymity and Accountability](#)
- Audrey Watters, [How the Library of Congress is building the Twitter archive](#)

Thursday:

LAB DAY— The Backchannel and the Filter Bubble

Read/watch beforehand:

- Melissa Terras, [The Impact of Social Media on the Dissemination of Research: Results of an Experiment](#)
- Derek Bruff, [Encouraging a Conference Backchannel on Twitter](#)
- danah boyd, [spectacle at Web2.0 Expo... from my perspective](#)
- Eli Parriser, [Beware Online “Filter Bubbles”](#)

The first portion of this class will consist of a little experiment on the “Filter Bubble” we encountered in the previous week. Depending on current events and the mood of the classroom, a set of topics will be decided upon. Students will bring in screen caps and discuss how various examples compare.

The latter portion of this class will focus on backchanneling, specifically Twitter. Students will set up Twitter accounts, and we will explore the way that Twitter works— general etiquette, Retweets, Hashtags, and the like. We will also learn to use Storify to create more permanent records of the discussion in the backchannel.

Remember once these are set up: backchanneling is participation. Continuing to use the decided-upon Twitter hashtag through the semester will benefit your participation

grade. This may be especially useful for those who may be less comfortable speaking up in class. However, the same standards of collegiality, civility, and the like apply in the backchannel, just like in the classroom.

Week 4:

Tuesday:

Copyright, copyleft, and open source

- [Creative Commons: About the Licenses](#)
- [A Shared Culture](#)
- Ellen Duranceau, [Scholarly Publication and Copyright: Retaining Rights & Increasing the Impact of Research](#)
- James Boyle and Jennifer Jenkins, [“Tales from the Public Domain: Bound by Law?”](#)
- Jack Dougherty and Candace Simpson [Who owns oral history? A Creative Commons Solution](#)
- Stuart Shieber, [An Efficient Journal](#)
- Dorothea Salo, [I hacked the Academy](#)
- [Harvard Library Faculty Advisory Council Memorandum on Journal Pricing, 17 April 2012](#)
- Ian Katz, [Tim Berners-Lee: Demand your data from Google and Facebook](#)

Thursday:

Elevator Pitches:

These are informal presentation of research topics for your final paper. Each student will talk about their topic for approximately 3 minutes, and will elicit feedback from the class about what kind of project might be suitable for it. In your pitch, please be sure to identify why the topic is interesting or relevant, the types of primary sources available to you as a researcher, the ease or difficulty of obtaining digital versions of these resources, and in what format they could be had. Also identify several research questions that you think might be interesting with this topic and body of resources.

The idea of these presentations is not to have your final project all figured out: the appropriate technological approaches will likely become more apparent as the class moves forward. At this point, the goal is to have a *good topic*, one that you understand, have identified available sources for, and would like to think about *through* the Digital History approaches we will cover in this class.

Due to the inherent differences between a traditional research paper and a digital history project, you are not just allowed but encouraged to choose a topic on which you

have already done some primary source research. However, please disclose this to me and make sure, throughout the project, to explain and demonstrate how what you are doing here is different.

Week 5:

Tuesday:

Wikipedia and crowdsourcing

- [Wikis in plain English](#)
- [How to Submit Wiki Articles \(Youtube\)](#)
- [Nature - "Internet encyclopaedias go head to head"](#)
- [Roy Rosenzweig, "Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past"](#)
- [Jimmy Wales, How a Ragtag Band Created Wikipedia](#)
- [Christopher Miller, Strange Facts in the History Classroom: Or How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Wiki\(pedia\)](#)
- [Mills Kelly, Why I Won't Get Hired at Middlebury](#)
- [Dan Cohen, The Spider and the Web: What Is This? and The Spider and the Web: Results](#)
- [Transcribe Bentham](#)
- [Michael Andersen, Four crowdsourcing lessons from the Guardian's \(spectacular\) expenses-scandal experiment](#)

Thursday:

LAB DAY: Wikipedia

In this lab, we will learn the basics of editing Wikipedia, adding citation, and learning and unpacking wikipedia's policies and guidelines. (NPOV, reliable sources, systemic bias, the five pillars, etc.) Students will make several edits to articles: a style or grammatical improvement, an added fact, an additional citation, and—if we have time—the class will, together, try to create a new stub or article.

Take note of where these are, and look back in a week or two to see how many of your changes survived, or were improved upon.

Module 2: Approaches in Digital History (Intro to Digital Methods)

Week 6:

Tuesday:

Mashups, Remixes, and APIs

- [RiP: A remix manifesto](#)
- [A Beginner's Guide to APIs](#)
- Dan Cohen, [Do APIs have a Place in the Digital Humanities?](#)
- Julie Meloni, "Working with APIs" [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), (optional: [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#))
- [Buffy vs Edward: Twilight Remixed](#)
- Kim Middleton, [Remix video and the crisis of the humanities](#)
- [Harvard Library Open MetaData](#) (Also see [this blog post](#) from the New York Times)

Thursday:

Lab Day: Accessibility

Read before class: Joe Clark, [How Do Disabled People Use Computers?](#)

The class will move around the lab, trying various accessibility simulators:

- [Vischeck](#)
- [Distractibility/Cognitive Overload](#)
- [Low Vision](#)
- [Dyslexia](#)
- [Screen Reader](#)
- [Lynx Viewer](#) (Or better yet, install Lynx itself.)

These simulations will be followed by a discussion of accessibility, its importance, best practices, challenges, etc.

Week 7:

Tuesday:

TEI and "Distant Reading"

- Erez Lieberman Aiden & Jean-Baptiste Michel, [A Picture is Worth 500 Billion Words](#)
- Dan Cohen, "From Babel to Knowledge: Data Mining Large Digital Collections"
- [The 2007 State of the Union Address](#)
- [Radiolab: Vanishing Words](#)
- [Speech Wars](#)
- Julie Melonie, [A Pleasant Little Chat About XML](#)
- [TEI by Example](#) Introduction, sections 1, 2, and 3.

Thursday:**LAB DAY— Visualization**

In this lab, we will be exploring several tools that allow beginners to explore the potential of visualization, namely [Google Ngram Viewer](#), [Wordle](#), and [Tableau Public](#). In preparation for this lab, please choose and read one short story from [Project Gutenberg](#), and bring in one large data table from the [NYC Open Data Mine](#), [Data.gov](#), or another similar open-data source.

Week 8:***Tuesday:*****GIS, Geodata, and Augmented Reality**

- Erin Sells, “[Mapping Novels with Google Earth](#)”
- Brian Croxall, “[All Things Google: Google Maps Labs](#)”
- Patricia Cohen, “[Digital Maps Are Giving Scholars the Historical Lay of the Land](#)”
- [Maps](#) from Franco Moretti’s *Graphs, Maps, and Trees*
- [Augmented Reality explained by Common Craft](#)
- Explore [Historypin](#). If you have a Smartphone, download the app and compare with the regular website.

Thursday:**Lab Day: Intro to photo editing.**

Select a photo in advance from the Library of Congress’s [Prints and Photographs](#) collection. Preferably an older one that has seen better days. This session will focus on the basics of using photo manipulation software, and some very basic strategies that can improve an image’s appearance.

Week 9:***Tuesday:*****Lab Day: Games and gamification**

[Code Hero](#) vs [JavaScript: The Definitive Guide](#)

Thursday:

Gamification and games

- Margaret Wallace, [The Gamification of...Everything?](#)
- Joey Lee and Jessica Hammer, [Gamification in Education: What, How, Why Bother?](#)
- Jason B. Jones, [Gamifying Homework](#)
- Abhijit Kadle, [3 Game Mechanics to Include in Learning Games](#)
- Ian Bogost, [Gamification is Bullshit](#)
- Tom Bennett, [Game Over: the perils of Gamifying the classroom.](#)

Final project proposal due.

Week 10:

Tuesday

Digital Classrooms

- William J. Turkel, [No "Secret Syllabus" for Digital History](#)
- Jeff Jarvis, [Lectures are Bullshit](#)
- Tad Suiter, [Re-inventing the Lecture \(Or, Why Online Lectures Don't Work, and What We Can Do About It\)](#)
- Sarah Amandolare, [Is Crowdsourcing the Future of College Education?](#)
- Cathy N. Davidson and David Theo Goldberg, "Pillars of Institutional Pedagogy: Ten Principles for the Future of Learning" in [The Future of Learning Institutions in a Digital Age](#)
- Randy Bass and Heidi Elmendorf, [Designing for Difficulty: Social Pedagogies as a Framework for Course Design](#)
- Paul Fyfe, [Digital Pedagogy Unplugged](#)
- Bethanie Nowviskie, [A Digital Boot Camp for Grad Students in the Humanities](#)

Thursday:

Libraries, Archives, and Museums in the Digital Age

- Micah Vandegrift, [What is Digital Humanities and What's it Doing in the Library?](#)
- Brad Johnson, [Beyond On-Line Collections: Putting Objects To Work](#)
- [Smithsonian Commons Prototype](#)
- Jim Richardson, [Rethinking the Museum for the Digital Age](#)
- [The Real Face of White Australia](#) (also see [this piece](#) by Kate Bagnall and [this one](#) from The Archival Platform.)
- Max J. Evans, [Archives of the People, by the People, for the People](#)
- Diane Zorich, et al. [Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration between Libraries, Archives, and Museums](#) pgs. 13-32

Module 3: Design Bootcamp and Final Projects

Module 3's schedule is somewhat more flexible, as it is a series of lab days centered around working on your final projects. Schedule may shift, and resources will be added, as we go through, so check the course website periodically.

Week 11:

Tuesday:
Wireframing and Workshopping

This session will focus on web design. After an interactive session, we will break into small groups and begin to work on what you might want your website to look like.

Thursday:
Intro to HTML 1

Week 12:

Tuesday:
Intro to HTML 2

Thursday:
Open Lab Day

Week 13:

Tuesday:
Intro to CSS 1

Thursday:
Intro to CSS 2

Week 14:

TBA

Week 15:

TBA

Appendix B: Selected Digital Humanities Syllabi

In preparing to create this syllabus, I began assembling all the digital humanities syllabi I could find. While this list is in no way comprehensive, I believe it is a good start, and represents well the wide range of approaches and topics that have been covered in various digital humanities courses. I have created an open [Zotero group](#) that houses the list, and it is my hope that over time more people will join and contribute to this list, making it a more comprehensive clearinghouse of digital humanities syllabi.

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