

ENGL 606: Introduction to the Digital Humanities

Wednesdays 4:00-6:50 p.m. | Colson Hall G18

Instructor: Dr. Erin Brock Carlson, erin.carlson@mail.wvu.edu

Office Hours: Monday 1-3 p.m. Colson 337; Wednesday 8.30-9.30 a.m. [virtually](#); by appointment

Course Links: [Schedule](#) and [Classroom](#)



Image courtesy of Glenn Carstens-Peters via [Unsplash](#)

Overview

There are many different ways to explain the field of Digital Humanities, its value, and its parameters, which leads to an admittedly complex notion of what DH work is and what it isn't. (Spoiler: I have a pretty expansive and flexible understanding of what DH work might entail, so if clear lines and borders regarding concepts are your thing, sorry.) David Berry (2012) offers this relatively concise assessment of how the field has developed:

...first-wave digital humanities involved the building of infrastructure in the studying of humanities texts through digital repositories, text markup, and so forth, whereas second-wave humanities expands the notional limits of the archive to include digital works...such as electronic literature, interactive fiction, web-based artifacts, and so forth...a third wave of the digital humanities [might concentrate] around...the digital component of the digital humanities...as a way of thinking about how media(l) changes produce epistemic changes [drawing from software studies, critical code, platform studies, etc.].

Lauren Klein (via a Facebook comment thread; very scholarly indeed) locates the field along three axes: applying humanities thought and methods to digital objects; applying digital methods to humanities objects; and merging digital and humanities to create new objects.

A brief look at this coming year's [Digital Humanities Summer Institute offerings](#) reveals clusters related to project/content management, storytelling, data visualization, Geographical Information Systems, sound, games, code, visual design, and social justice concerns. In fact, this last concern is now a central focus of the field. Gold and Klein (2019) pose the following question: "What is the role of the digital humanities in the charged environment of 2019, and how can digital humanists ally themselves with the activists, organizers, and others who are working to empower those most threatened by it?...we are convinced that digital humanists can contribute significantly to a larger technically and historically informed resistance." I don't know about you, but this speaks to me. What are we doing *in* the academy if we aren't trying to do something *outside* of it?

While we won't have time to cover every aspect of this expansive field, we have two major tasks for our time together: first, to interrogate the role of digital technologies in the ways we understand our teaching, research, and daily lives; and second, to practice doing digital humanities inquiry by using digital tools to help us understand how technology mediates thought and action.

At the end of this course, you will possess:

- **Familiarity** with major debates and ongoing conversations in the field of DH;
- **Knowledge** of DH research approaches and their underlying methodologies;
- **Understanding** of how your own research, teaching, and public work might intersect with the field of DH, broadly defined;
- **Experience** with a range of digital tools that can aid DH work; and
- **Consideration** of the broad social, legal and ethical questions and concerns surrounding digital media and contemporary culture, including intellectual property concerns, social inequalities, and material considerations of technoculture.

Required Texts

In addition to articles and excerpts that I provide, you will need to have access to:

- *Algorithms of Oppression*, Safiya Noble [[free from WVU library](#)]
- *All Data are Local*, Yanni Alexander Loukissas [[free from WVU library](#)]
- *Geographies of Exclusion*, Mark Graham and Martin Dittus [[free from publisher](#)]
- *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2023*, Matthew Gold & Lauren Klein [DDH23]
 - Note: This is also available from the authors for [online reading, free](#); and we will read from their earlier editions in 2012, 2016, and 2019.

Course Tools

We will work with a variety of digital tools over the course of the semester (see Assignment Overviews below), but we will use Google Classroom each week to share resources and complete assignments. You can access the classroom space [through this link](#). **You will need to have access to a computer during many of our class meetings, so bring your own or be prepared to use a lab machine.**

Assignment Overviews

Below are overviews of each major assignment. I will provide more in-depth instructions in class. Please note that the course is split into four sections: intro to digital humanities, digital interfaces, digital data, and digital infrastructures.

DH Project Profile (10%)

Our meeting during Week 2 will start with brief presentations in the style of PechaKucha (20 slides with 15 seconds of commentary each, for a total of about 5 minutes) on a DH initiative or project of your choice. One of the best ways to understand how others are approaching DH research is to examine established projects and their objectives/outcomes, and you will prepare a review of your project, focusing on its purpose, its contributions, its design, its technologies, and its relationship to the field.

Artificial Intelligence Portfolio (10%)

It's all the rage these days. You will experiment with an AI tool of your choice (we will define what this means): Chat GPT, filters on TikTok, Grammarly, an image or voice generator, or something else. You will submit your creations (whatever they may be) and write a brief summary of your experience and analysis that connects the technology to conversations we've engaged in class.

Data Case Study (15%)

In order to continue thinking about the subjective nature of data, you will conduct your own case study on a collection of data (this could be a data visualization or a data source). In addition to providing an overview of what the data seems to be suggesting, you will also interrogate its collection, curation, and distribution processes, as well as its purpose.

Final Project (40%)

You will have the opportunity to either work on an individual project that helps you investigate a question of interest or that develops other ongoing work, or to participate in a collaborative project with myself and other members of the class. We did this last time I taught the course, and the [outcome](#) was so cool.

Because I want this course to help you consider how DH methodologies/methods might support your ongoing work, the final project asks you to take up a question related to the wide field of Digital Humanities. The final project **must** have some sort of digital component: whether it is hosted online to allow for public reception, or uses one of the tools we discussed in class (or you found on your own) to support your argument, or focuses explicitly on digital data or environments (or some combination of these), is up to you. While it is admittedly difficult to draw equivalences between written text and digital projects, think about the effort it takes to research and write 8-12 pages of single-spaced text, and aim for that.

Class Preparation and In-Class Activities (25%)

This class will require a lot of engagement during our meetings, as we'll do a range of activities. And given the size of our class, preparation work will look a bit different than perhaps we are used to. We will have [3 teams](#) (I hope you name them, I really do) that will complete the following on alternate weeks in order to engage with the readings before we meet for class. You can earn up to 5 points each week for class preparation work. If you miss activities in class that are worth points, you cannot make those points up.

- **Reading Responses:** You will write a response of roughly 500 words in which you critically engage **one** of the texts read for that day as well as at least one additional text of your own choice (from the current week, from a previous week, or from your own research). [Casey Boyle's piece on reading ethics](#) offers strategies for effective reader response.
- **Dialectic Notebook:** You will contribute no fewer than 10 entries to our dialectic notebook about the readings before you come to class. An entry might be a quote/paraphrase of a text (left side of notebook), a response to a quote/paraphrase (right side of notebook), or a response to a peer's response (a comment in the margin). Please don't hesitate to include

ideas from other classes, your life, or things we've discussed in previous class sessions. Here is [an example from a previous semester](#).

- **Discussion Questions:** You will come up with **two questions**: one that focuses on connections between the readings, and one that helps us delve deeper into a reading of your choice. You will post these on the appropriate post on the Classroom stream.

Course policies

I follow all of [WVU's standard policies](#), but there are a few (below) that I'd call your attention to.

Community

Graduate courses, I (perhaps naively) believe, can be a generative and transformative space in an institution that is...perhaps not so much those things; however, to make it such a space, it requires our full engagement. This means that I expect you to come to class having done the readings and ready to discuss them, question them, and build with them.

I take seriously the need to provide a respectful and supportive environment in our course—a space that I hope can be generative or even transformative for all of us. You are expected to treat everyone in our community with kindness and respect. I have a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination and harassment in all forms.

Accessibility

I strive to make my courses as accessible and accommodating to all persons as I can. If you require any specific accommodations, please send me an email within the first week of the term in order to discuss any necessary adjustments, or as needed throughout the course. For more information, consult the [Office of Accessibility Services](#).

Community health

Sicknesses abound these days, so please...If you are sick, do not come to class. If you don't feel well or have been around other folks you know are ill and attend class, please wear a mask and respect others' personal space. There are folks in class (including me!) that are high risk or live with high risk individuals.

If you miss more than three classes, that will present a significant barrier in your contribution to the course and we will need to discuss a plan of action that works for everyone.

Student success, mental health, and basic needs

WVU has a number of resources and offices dedicated to student success. Of special note, when it comes to writing, is the [Eberly Writing Studio](#), located here in Colson Hall. (On a personal note: I was a writing center consultant during my BA and MA, and wouldn't have been able to write my dissertation without visiting the writing center each week, from prospectus to final edits. It's a wonderful space and I encourage you to take advantage of it.)

Being a student is really hard, and it's often a big adjustment from whatever you were doing in your previous life. WVU does have resources available on campus, and most are available at no-charge. [The Carruth Center for Psychological and Psychiatric Services](#) (CCPPS) offers consultations, short-term individual therapy, group therapy, and various mental health-related workshops. Virtual and in-person (outside of pandemic situations) services are available. Crisis services are also available 24/7/365: you can text "WVU" to 741741 for support from a trained Crisis Counselor.

However, I do want to acknowledge that the stressors of being a graduate student, instructor, and scholar are different from the pressures that most undergraduate students face. The mental health of graduate students is [deeply overlooked](#), so I want to encourage you to be cognizant of your own wellness and to advocate for yourself in every space, including this class. I am a resource to help you work through the difficulties of balancing these different roles; however, those different roles include being an active and committed participant in our course. If you do not feel like you can fulfill that role, I will encourage you to drop the course.

Any student who faces challenges securing their food, housing, or other elements of wellbeing, and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Student Advocacy Center for support. Please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to provide any resources that I may possess and to try and connect you to others.

Unit 1 | Digital Humanities!

Week 1: Introduction to Digital Humanities

Wednesday, January 10

Reading	Kirschenbaum, “What is DH and what’s it doing in English departments?” Gold & Klein, “The Digital Humanities, moment to moment”
Writing	
In-Class	Introductions

Week 2: Roots of DH

Wednesday, January 17

Reading	Hayles, “How we think” (PDF) Spiro, “This is why we fight” Various, “Digital Humanities manifesto” Dombrowski & Burns, “Language is not a default setting”
Writing	Everything but the Kitchen Sink: Reading response The Bzzzzzy Bees: Dialectic notebook Five Guys, Burgers, and Files: Discussion questions
In-Class	DH Project profile presentations Topic modeling

Week 3: **CLASS CANCELLED**

Wednesday, January 24

Reading	
Writing	
In-Class	

Week 4: Coding and computational thinking

Wednesday, January 31

Reading	Vee, Understanding computer programming as literacy (PDF) Cummings, “Coding with power” Wing, “Computational thinking” & “Computational thinking 10 years later” McPherson, “Why are digital humanities so white?...histories of race + computation”
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Writing	Everything but the Kitchen Sink: Discussion questions The Bzzzzzy Bees: Reading response Five Guys, Burgers, and Files: Dialectic notebook
In-Class	Twine

Unit 2 | Digital Interfaces

Week 5: Interfaces and identity

Wednesday, February 7

Reading	Selfe & Selfe, "Politics of the interface" Arola, "The design of web 2.0: The rise of the template, the fall of design" Algorithms of Oppression , introduction and chps. 1-2 Gruwell, "Wikipedia's politics of exclusion"
Writing	Everything but the Kitchen Sink: Dialectic notebook The Bzzzzzy Bees: Discussion questions Five Guys, Burgers, and Files: Reading response
In-Class	Wikipedia (or maybe something else, EBC might change her mind)

Week 6: Artificial intelligence and embodiment

Wednesday, February 14

Reading	Algorithms of Oppression , chps. 3-6 and conclusion/epilogue Brown et al., "Relation-oriented AI" Gibson, "Digital Humanities in the deepfake era"
Writing	<i>Upload heuristic from activity in Week 5 to slide deck</i> Everything but the Kitchen Sink: Reading response The Bzzzzzy Bees: Dialectic notebook Five Guys, Burgers, and Files: Discussion questions
In-Class	Google AI Test Kitchen

Week 7: Experience architecture (usability, UX, etc.)

Wednesday, February 21

Reading	Norman, excerpt from <i>The Design of Everyday Things</i> (PDF) Potts & Salvo, "Introduction" to <i>Experience Architecture</i> (PDF)
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	<p>Morris, "Relocations: Reenvisioning rhetoric" (PDF)</p> <p>Sano-Franchini, "What can Asian eyelids teach us about UX design"</p> <p>Cameron, "Amplifying diverse narratives of social support in online health design"</p>
Writing	<p>Everything but the Kitchen Sink: Discussion questions</p> <p>The Bzzzzzy Bees: Reading response</p> <p>Five Guys, Burgers, and Files: Dialectic notebook</p>
In-Class	User testing

Week 8: Archives

Wednesday, February 28

Reading	<p>Graban et al., Chp. 17 in Rhetoric and the Digital Humanities</p> <p>Schofield et al., "Archival liveness: Designing with collections..."</p> <p>Kim, "Building pleasure and the digital archive"</p> <p>Manovich, "How to compare one million images?" (PDF)</p>
Writing	<p>AI Portfolio Due</p> <p>Collaborative reading response (creating an archive of archives)</p>
In-Class	<p>Web archives</p> <p>Final project look-ahead</p>

Unit 3 | Digital Data

Week 9: Data

Wednesday, March 6

Reading	<p>All Data are Local, intro and chps. 1, 2, 5</p> <p>Rawson & Muñoz, "Against cleaning"</p> <p>Smith & Whearty, "All the work you do not see"</p>
Writing	<p>Reading response that incorporates the readings/our discussion as well as the talk we're attending, due on Friday, March 8, whenever</p>
In-Class	<p>Attending the talk in history with Dr. Péter at 6 p.m.</p> <p>Data case study prompt</p>

Week 10: Spring Break

Wednesday, March 13

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Enjoy your break! Maybe think about your final projects based on our shared project idea.

Week 11: Privacy and data mining

Wednesday, March 20

Reading	<p>All Data are Local, chps. 3 & 4</p> <p>Boyles et al., "Operationalizing surveillance studies in DH"</p> <p>Coleman, "Domestic disturbances: Precarity, agency, data"</p> <p>Kerr et al., "Visualization and rhetoric: Case study of vaccination discourses"</p>
Writing	<p>Everything but the Kitchen Sink: Dialectic notebook</p> <p>The Bzzzzzy Bees: Discussion questions</p> <p>Five Guys, Burgers, and Files: Reading response</p>
In-Class	<p>Data privacy check-up</p> <p>Final project prompt</p>

Week 12: Data's materiality

Wednesday, March 27

Reading	<p>Guldi, "Addressing an emergency"</p> <p>Graham & Dittus, Chps. 1 & 5 in Geographies of Digital Exclusion</p> <p>Edwards, "Critical infrastructure literacies" (PDF)</p> <p>Peters, excerpt from <i>The Marvelous Clouds</i> (PDF)</p>
Writing	<p>Everything but the Kitchen Sink: Reading response</p> <p>The Bzzzzzy Bees: Dialectic notebook</p> <p>Five Guys, Burgers, and Files: Discussion questions</p>
In-Class	<p>Google maps</p> <p>Final project brainstorming</p>

Week 13: Borne-digital methods

Wednesday, April 3

Reading	<p>levenberg et al., "Introduction" (Chapter 1)</p> <p>One additional chapter of your choice from this book ^</p> <p>Gries, "Mapping Obama Hope"</p> <p>McNely & Teston, Tactical and strategic: Qualitative approaches to DH (PDF)</p>
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Writing	<p>Data Case Study due by class</p> <p>Fill out final project blurb doc</p> <p>Everything but the Kitchen Sink: Discussion questions</p> <p>The Bzzzzzy Bees: Reading response</p> <p>Five Guys, Burgers, and Files: Dialectic notebook</p>
In-Class	<p>Iconographic tracking</p> <p>Final project proposal heuristic/manifesto brainstorming</p>

Unit 4 | Digital Infrastructures

Week 14: Project development

Wednesday, April 10

<p>Work on developing your final projects! Start drafting the manifesto!</p> <p>Turn in a final project proposal (500-750 words) sometime on Wednesday 4/10</p> <p>EBC can meet this week individually; please email to set up a time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monday 1-3 Tuesday/Thursday via Zoom Wednesday 4-5 	
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Week 15: The digital and beyond

Wednesday, April 17

Reading	<p>Earhart, “Can we trust the university? DH collabs with exploited communities”</p> <p>Mann, “Paid to do but not to think: Reevaluating the role of graduate student...”</p>
Writing	<p>V. early draft of your chapter</p> <p>Contributions to the manifesto</p>
In-Class	<p>Final project check-in</p>

Week 16: Digital literacies and conclusions

Wednesday, April 24

Reading	
Writing	<p>Working draft of chapter</p> <p>Revised manifesto</p> <p>Created, structured webspace</p>

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In-Class	Conclusions Task management for polishing final projects
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Week 17: Finals

Final project due on Wednesday, 5/1