

Humanities 2DH3: Introduction to Digital Humanities

Winter 2018, M 12:30-1:30/W 1:30-3:30

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Prerequisites: Prerequisite(s): Registration in Level II or above of a program in the Faculty of Humanities

I. What Are We Doing Here?

This class is an introduction to some of the key topics, theories, and conversations that underlie digital scholarship. It does so through an in-depth exploration of perhaps the most fundamental underlying concept in digital scholarship: the idea of “data.” To do so, the course is divided into three units that all touch on data in one way or another. In the first, we will look at the ways that we organize ideas and material objects, thinking about both their benefits and critiques. The second unit will then build off the first, concentrating on ways to critically interpret both data and the methods that data is actually encoded in through examination of real-world examples. Finally, for the third unit we will put the lessons learned in the second unit into practice by finding, creating, and working with our own data sets.

All three units will exist within the framework of a game, wherein you will be asked to take on the role of new volunteers in an activist group. That group has realized the potential of data-driven journalism to shape society, but lacks the tools and methods needed to really get their message out to the world. As new volunteers, you have been charged to learn everything you can about the role of data in forming decisions and shaping opinions, and to then put that knowledge in the service of your organization’s goals.

Practically, what this will mean is that each class week will be divided into two parts. In the Monday class session, we’ll discuss the readings and learn about some of the possibilities of data. In the Wednesday sessions, however, the classroom will be transformed into a collaborative workspace for activists, where members of many groups come together to put their knowledge into practice in the service of their group’s goals.

Through all of this work, my goals for you in this course are to be able to:

- Describe, discuss and evaluate the role of emerging computational tools and methods within the humanities and society at large.
- Debate the benefits and drawbacks of these computational tools and methods as well as their applications.
- Evaluate and apply the DH tools and methods explored in the course to specific disciplinary fields and areas of study.
- Exercise and continue to develop your skills as an analytical reader, critical thinker, and articulate academic writer.

II. Required Texts and Materials

- All the required readings will be posted on Avenue to Learn, our Learning Management System.

III. How will I be graded?

A detailed description of each assignment will be posted in Avenue to Learn and explained in class, and will take the form of directives from the directorship of your various activist groups. Feedback – both from myself and your fellow students – will also happen in class during our collaborative workspace meetings, and more formal grades will be posted to Avenue to Learn.

During our first week, we'll also discuss what you want your group to be like as an organization – what sort of things they're trying to do in the world, what their goals are, and how they might think data will fit into both of those things.

Weekly Topics

Week 1 - Introduction

Week 2 – Putting things in their place – Organizing things

Week 3 – What is data and how do we think about it?

Week 4 – Classification of physical data – the archive.

Week 5 – The data debate – what can it do and what can't it?

Week 6 – Visualizations, or how Graphs can be Misleading

Week 7 – MID TERM RECESS

Week 8: Data structures as critical thinking tool

Week 9: Data Crosswalks

Week 10 – Social media, metadata, and manipulating either.

Week 11 – Memes, “Fake News,” and Data Journalism

Week 12 - Formally structuring our information

Week 13 - Presenting your findings

Week 14 – Final outcomes