FIS 2331: 
Introduction to Digital Humanities

Time: Wednesdays, 9:00 am – 11:50 am
Location: TBA
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Office hours: Mondays, 10:30 am to noon
Tuesdays, 10:30 am to noon
or by appointment

Overview

Over the past decade, the term “digital humanities” has come to name the
intersection of digital technologies and humanities scholarship, and particularly the
ethos of “thinking through making” in the humanities. Digital humanists use
computing technologies to produce new knowledge about traditional humanities
domains like literature, art, philosophy, culture, and history; reciprocally, digital
humanists also use these perspectives to think critically about new (and old)
technologies in all forms. This course will introduce students to this still-emerging
field, with a focus on the cultural histories and possible futures of books, libraries,
and archives. Our readings will survey topics such as the ontology of born-digital
artifacts, disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, theories and practices of text encoding,
the gendering of texts and technologies, the politics of digital archiving, the
materiality of digital texts, and the epistemology of digital tools in the humanities.
Students will also receive a practical introduction to XML markup and related
technologies. Prior experience with programming and text encoding is welcome, but
not necessary.

Readings

Our primary course text will be

A Companion to Digital Humanities. Ed. Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and

The softcover edition costs about $40. An open-access version of the Companion is
available here: http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/

Other readings will be available as links on the course website or photocopies in the
course binder held in the Inforum (4th floor of the Bissell bldg.).
Evaluation

10% participation
20% digital edition/archive review essay
30% XML encoding project & report
40% final paper

Late papers and assignments will be penalized 3 percentage points per day (weekends count as 2 days). I will grant extensions only in advance of the assignment deadline, and only if the student provides a documented reason such as illness.

Participation

This mark is determined by the quality of your contributions to class discussion. The course is largely structured by ongoing intellectual debates in the digital humanities, and you should come prepared to engage those debates, not just observe or report on them. This means reading all of the week’s assigned materials, allowing yourself enough time to think about them (i.e. not leaving them till the night before class), and coming to class with things to say about them. Participation depends just as much on listening as speaking, so I ask that you listen carefully to everyone’s input, consider the effects of your own comments, and respect all members of the class.

Digital edition/archive review essay

In this assignment, students will evaluate a digital scholarly edition or archive of their choice, and write a short paper in the genre of the review essay. Review essays are like book reviews, only longer and typically structured by an argument that extends beyond evaluation of the book under review. In other words, a review essay uses the evaluation of a given resource as an opportunity to think about broader questions. Students must consult with me in advance about their choice of digital edition or archive.

XML encoding project & report

This assignment is intended to introduce students to the complexities of digitally modelling print or manuscript materials. Students will select a short text like a poem, scene from a play, prose fragment, or other example of primary source material, and then encode it in XML. This involves making choices about which aspects of the original to encode, and how to contend with the structural constraints of XML. Students may wish to use established encoding guidelines like those of the Text Encoding Initiative, or to devise their own system. In either case, the accompanying report must articulate a rationale for these choices, and reflect on how the process of encoding can lead to new ways to understand the material.

Research paper

This final essay should explore a topic appropriate to the course, drawing upon primary and secondary sources to advance an original argument. I encourage you to
start thinking about your final paper as soon as possible. This may require you to read ahead if you wish to write on a topic covered toward the end of our schedule, like text analysis. Papers must be between 15 and 20 pages in length, not including references, screenshots, or long excerpts of code.

**Academic integrity**

From Jens-Erik Mai, Acting Dean, Faculty of Information: “The essence of academic life revolves around respect not only for the ideas of others, but also their rights to those ideas and their promulgation. It is therefore essential that all of us engaged in the life of the mind take the utmost care that the ideas and expressions of ideas of other people always be appropriately handled, and, where necessary, cited. For writing assignments, when ideas or materials of others are used, they must be cited. […] In any situation, if you have a question, please feel free to ask. Such attention to ideas and acknowledgement of their sources is central not only to academic life, but life in general. Please acquaint yourself with U of T’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters: [http://www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/behaveac.pdf](http://www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/behaveac.pdf)”

**Schedule**

[Note: the guests and class visits listed here are tentative, and I have not yet approached the people involved about speaking to the class.]

* reading not in Blackwell Companion

6 Jan.  **Introduction: what are the (digital) humanities?**
- subtopics: history of the humanities from the Renaissance; history of liberal arts; role of arts in information society; rethinking “the human”

13 Jan.  **Disciplinarity and method in the humanities**
- subtopics: data vs texts; what is interpretation?; humanities vs hard sciences vs social sciences; methods in the interpretive social sciences (eg. anthropology)
- readings
  - Jerome McGann, “Information Technology and the Troubled Humanities”*
  - Julia Flanders, “Detailism, Digital Texts, and the Problem of Pedantry”*

20 Jan.  **Digital text and the history of writing**
- subtopics: orality and literacy; history of the book; early hypertext theory
- readings
  - Jay David Bolter, “Writing as Technology”*
  - Roger Chartier, “Languages, Books, and Reading from the Printed Word to the Digital Text”*

27 Jan.  **Digitization of humanities materials**
- subtopics: materiality of texts; what is evidence?; Google Books; Early English Books Online; The Canterbury Tales Project
• class visit: digitization facilities in Robarts (depending on class size)
• readings
  o Jerome McGann, “Visible and Invisible Books: Hermetic Images in N-Dimensional Space”*
  o Marilyn Deegan and Simon Tanner, “Conversion of Primary Sources”
  o Anthony Grafton, “Future Reading: Digitization and its Discontents”*

3 Feb.  **Digital editions and archives**
• subtopics: what is a scholarly edition?; “edition” vs “archive”; Internet Shakespeare Editions; Electronic New Variorum Shakespeare
• guest: Sally-Beth MacLean, Dept. of English and Records of Early English Drama (REED) Project
• readings
  o Jerome McGann, “The Rationale of HyperText”*
  o Marta Nell Smith, “Electronic Scholarly Editing”

10 Feb.  **Interface and materiality**
• subtopics: the materiality of texts; sociological orientations in editorial theory; William Blake Electronic Archive; Edition Production and Presentation Technology
• readings
  o Matthew Kirschenbaum, "'So the Colors Cover the Wires': Interface, Aesthetics, and Usability"

17 Feb.  Reading week (no class)

24 Feb.  **Modeling and markup theory**
• subtopics: “models of” vs “models for”; abstraction; history of markup and encoding; history of punctuation; example from authorial mss of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ poem, “As Kingfishers Catch Fire”; the Text Encoding Initiative
• readings
  o Willard McCarty, “Modeling: A Study in Words and Meanings”
  o Allen Rneear, "Text Encoding"

3 March  **What is text?: the debate over structure**
• subtopics: more history of markup, from SGML to HTML to XML; normalization; essentialism
• readings
  o Allen Renear, "Out of Praxis: Three (Meta)Theories of Textuality”*
  o Jerome McGann, “Marking Texts of Many Dimensions”

10 March  **Thinking through making: epistemology and design**
• subtopics: digital humanities and cybercultural studies; project-oriented vs critically oriented approaches; what is a prototype?
• guest: Matt Ratto, Faculty of Information
• readings
  o Katharine Hayles, “Translating Media: Why We Should Rethink
Textuality*
  o Stephen Ramsay, “Databases”

17 March  **Text analysis and algorithmic criticism**
  • subtopics: linguistics; analytical vs representational approaches to texts; WordHoard
  • guest: Ian Lancashire, Dept. of English
  • readings
    o Stephen Ramsey, “In Praise of Pattern”*
    o Martin Mueller, “Digital Shakespeare, or Towards a Literary Informatics”*
    o Stéfan Sinclair, “Computer-Assisted Reading: Reconceiving Text Analysis”*

24 March  **Virtuality and subjectivity**
  • subtopics: hypertext theory and after; gendering of writing technologies; cybernetics; humanism and post-humanism
  • readings
    o Julia Flanders, "The BodyEncoded: Questions of Gender and the Electronic Text"*
    o Christopher Keep, "The Disturbing Liveliness of Machines: Rethinking the Body in Hypertext Theory and Fiction”*
    o Tamise van Pelt, “The Question Concerning Theory: Humanism, Subjectivity, and Computing”*

31 March  **Born-digital narrative**
  • subtopics: pre-digital multilinear narratives (Ovid, Sterne); hypertext literature; digital poetry; Shelly Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl*; video game studies; *Half-Life* and mod communities; Electronic Literature Organization
  • readings
    o Matthew Kirschenbaum, “Editing the Interface”
    o Espen Aarseth, “Introduction: Ergdodic Literature”*

7 April  **Users, readers, and audiences... and players**
  • subtopics: history of reading; cognitive reader studies; usability & user experience studies; performance; gaming
  • readings
    o Andrew Dillon, *Designing Usable Electronic Text*, ch. 4: "Describing the Reading Process at an Appropriate Level"
    o Robert Darnton, “The Library in the New Age”