

Digital Public Humanities (AMST 2692)

Course Site: <http://fall2017digitalpublichumanities.jimmcgrath.us/>

Syllabus last updated on 8/23/17

Instructor: Jim McGrath, PhD

Dates / Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1pm-2:30pm

Location: Seminar Room, John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage (357 Benefit St.; 2nd floor, entrance in rear of building)

Office Hours: Thursdays, 11:30am-1pm or by appointment (my office is down the hall from the Seminar Room in the JNBC)

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Official Course Description

What is “digital humanities” and how does it impact and intersect with the field of public humanities? Digital humanities work involves new approaches to reading, writing, research, publication, and curation: digital tools help us examine digital and non-digital material in innovative ways, and digital modes of communication help us reach new and wider ranges of audiences. This course provides students with the opportunity to create digital projects and utilize digital tools to further their academic and professional interests.

Key questions of the course include:

How can digital tools and resources make cultural objects more accessible, engaging, and relevant to the personal and professional lives of various publics?

What can working with a particular team of collaborators (the great people at PPL Special Collections) teach us about the benefits and challenges of digital preservation, digital archives, and digital curation (and, more generally, about the ways the long history of non-digital approaches to archives, preservation, and curation inform digital archives and curation)?

What is digital humanities, and how can public humanities practitioners productively collaborate, critique, revise, and reimagine the shape of this field through the practice of digital public humanities?

How can I do cool things with digital tools, resources, and publication platforms? Who is doing cool things already?

Learning Goals

In this course, students will:

- Examine the recent (and still developing) history of digital humanities and the uses of digital spaces and tools by cultural institutions, academics, and other parties (artists, activists, community reps) interested in various forms of public engagement
- Review best practices for the creation, management, publication, promotion, and preservation of digital exhibits and objects
- Demonstrate familiarity with best practices via a collaboration with a community partner on a digital public humanities project
- Determine where and how digital public humanities methodologies and resources might align with their own research interests and professional goals

The centerpiece of this class is an exciting collaboration with the **Providence Public Library Special Collections Department**. Over the course of the semester, students will visit the PPL to learn about the department's digital projects and publications, as well as the various other ways that digital tools and contexts factor impact the department's work with collections materials. Students will then work with the PPL to develop ideas for digital initiatives related to three special collections. This work will involve learning about these particular collections, considering the various audiences interested in accessing and using these materials, and developing concrete suggestions for how the PPL might share these resources in digital spaces and contexts. This collaboration will conclude with a formal presentation of these suggestions to PPL Special Collections in December.

In preparation for work with the PPL, students will learn about best practices related to digitization, digital curation, archiving, and preservation, and the innovative and creative uses of digital resources by a wide range of publics: scholars, students, activists, librarians, artists, lawmakers, journalists, community organizers, and more. In other words, we'll be reading across a wide range of textual contexts, and you may find some readings inviting and others slightly less so. Learning how these various practitioners and fields consider and discuss digital work is hopefully more rewarding than frustrating!

Course Requirements

Over 15 weeks, students will spend three hours per week in class (45 hours total). Engagement with course readings and research related to digital tools and projects will take approximately 4 1/2 hours per week (68 hours total). Completion of major course work — “How Did They Make That?” presentation, Pop-Up Exhibit project, and PPL Collaboration — is estimated to take 67 hours total (spread across the semester). **In total, time estimated to complete activities related to this class should take 180 hours to complete over the course of the semester** (on average, 12 hours per week). These estimates are in line with time estimates for typical Brown University courses. Please be in touch ASAP if you have questions about course completion expectations.

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you have a disability or other conditions that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu. Students in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact one of the deans in the Dean of the College office.

Reliable web access: Given the nature of this course, it's essential that you be able to get on the web on a regular basis. Please see me if you have any questions about this requirement or if you'd like to talk about resources here at Brown.

Classroom technology: There may be days when we will require the use of laptops, tablets, and/or smartphones to view and complete course work. There may be particular days when a laptop is preferable to a tablet, given the need to work with a particular tool. I will let you know in advance should these needs arise if you require additional

resources. You are not required to purchase or own laptops, tablets, and/or smart phones for this course (though you may find that bringing one or more of these devices to class is useful). Bringing a Wifi-enabled device you're comfortable reading and writing on in class is recommended but not required.

Slack: The class will use Slack to comment on weekly readings and to augment class discussions. Slack is free and accessible via a web address or the Slack application. We'll discuss how we're using Slack this semester during our first class.

Course Readings

Course reading are outlined in the semester calendar. Direct links to readings can be found on the public-facing course site (not the Canvas site!). Most readings are accessible online (in some cases, you may need to be logged in to your Brown account to view content due to licensing). If a reading is not publicly accessible online, I'll get it to you by other means.

Course Policies

I expect that students will regularly attend class sessions, keep up with readings, and submit graded work on time. I also assume that students will participate in class discussions and be respectful of their peers in said discussions. Please contact me ASAP if you have any questions or issues related to the course. I'm also happy to meet with students during office hours or by appointment.

Major Assignments

Providence Public Library Collaboration (50% of grade). Over the course of the semester, you'll be working with staff members of the Providence Public Library Special Collections Department to develop proposals for how the PPL might effectively use digital tools and contexts to make three special collections more engaging and accessible to audiences. These proposals will be presented to PPL Special Collections staff in December and will be accompanied by a document outlining particular project recommendations. This is a collaborative assignment: the details of the collaboration will be solidified this semester once our final class roster is set and you've been introduced to the PPL and these particular special collections.

We will take two class visits (during class time) to PPL Special Collections, in addition to the presentation of final proposals in December. These dates can be found on the semester calendar. You are also encouraged to visit PPL Special Collections outside of class time to continue work. We will also likely set aside at least one additional date this semester to provide students with an opportunity to develop proposals.

“How Did They Make That?” Class Session (15% of grade): Starting in October, each student will lead a brief class session (15-30 minutes in length) focused on a digital tool, project, or topic of their choosing. Ideally, these discussions will relate in some direct way to course readings, your PPL work, or a particular research interest you’re invested in. You are encouraged to be creative in your approach to completing this task: you may favor a more traditional presentation, a hands-on demo of something you’ve been working on, a workshop-style use of a particular tool, an informal conversation, or another format. Talk to me if you have questions about this requirement.

“Digital Pop-Up Exhibit” (15% of grade): This requirement invites students to complete a “pop-up” style digital exhibit that they can share with a particular audience. The goal here is to create something that is engaging but also ephemeral while using a particular digital tool or publication format: an augmented reality experience, a digital projection, a Twitter bot, or another project. This project can be collaborative, and we may decide to collaborate as an entire class on a particular initiative (I’ve had informal discussions with both the PPL and the JNBC about potential ideas). We may also end up doing more than one thing, depending on class interest. We’ll figure out the particular parameters of this requirement (specifically, project goals, audience, deliverables, and assessment) together in class.

Professional Identities and Digital Contexts (10%): At the beginning of the semester, I’ll ask each of you to think about how your professional lives and aspirations intersect with digital contexts, and we’ll discuss how you might further explore or test out these places of intersection with a particular task. “Successful” projects in this vein have included creating or revising a personal web site, using Twitter or another social media network in a professional or creative endeavor, communicating with other professionals in some digital capacity, applying for a particular conference, doing an informal environmental scan of a digital/professional space relevant to your interests, etc. You are free to revise your idea at any point during the semester, but you’ll be expected to document what you ended up doing via email or a meeting with me at the end of the semester.

Written responses to course readings on Slack (10%): This requirement may be the most straightforward, though I would encourage students to take advantage of the particular dimensions of writing and communicating on Slack: hyperlinks, media files, iterative writing (vs. more “traditional” digital response parameters encouraged by Canvas or Blackboard), etc. We’ll check in regularly re: how Slack is working (or not working) this semester.