Syllabus

This seminar will address the relationships between digital computing and the humanities, both as a subject of historical interest and of contemporary practical concern. We will delve into what it means, if anything, to be a “digital humanist” today by engaging in the ongoing theoretical discussions about the digital humanities (allied social sciences, liberal arts, etc...), but also by sitting down and finding out what it takes to actually implement this type of research in the digital environment. You will leave this class having gained a personally-significant understanding of current debates in the field as well as having built a digital project that furthers your own research.

Instructor
Alison Langmead (ADL40@pitt.edu)
Office Location: 116 Frick Fine Arts
Office Hours: By appointment, but are frequently available. Simply ask in person or by email.

Learning Objectives
• Upon completion of this course, students will have successfully formed, implemented, and concluded an original argument in their own scholarly domain, an argument whose construction relies on the use of analytic digital technologies.
• Students will also leave this course with an understanding of the ways in which digital technologies are being used in disciplines across the humanities and allied social sciences. Such domains include, but are not limited to, music, art and architectural history, media studies, studies of language and literature, history, and linguistics.
• Students will learn how to assess and examine their process as well as their digital products.
• Finally, students will become conversant in the current theoretical and political debates happening in the academy surrounding the use of digital technologies in the above domains.

Course Expectations
• This course is both discussion-based and making-intensive. Students will come to class prepared for the session by having read/watched/created all that is requested of them by the syllabus.
• Students will productively engage to the fullest of their abilities in each and every class session. “Engagement” is not restricted to “speaking publicly in front of a group.” I will provide other opportunities to engage outside of the spoken classroom environment, and am very eager to collaborate with you on fostering an environment of openness and wonder.
• I expect the group to focus on being problem-driven rather than tool-driven. This is to say that, in this class, we are, first and foremost, practicing the study of the humans and their material, social and intellectual environments. We discover an interesting problem, or latch onto an idea, or embody some other form of engagement. In this seminar, tool selection comes next.¹

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity
Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity.

Disability Services
If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and Disability Resources and Services (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, drsrecep@pitt.edu, (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as early as possible in the term. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.

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Statement on Classroom Recording
To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance may be used solely for the student's own private use.

Note on Digital Workflow
Producing digital projects in the humanities and allied social sciences is not (quite yet) associated with a traditional, patterned workflow. Over the years, I have begun to develop my own, and have noted that others seem to benefit from it, and so I offer it here in that spirit. I use a word in the workflow, "capta," that may not be familiar to you, but it is part of the contemporary conversation about what constitutes the “data” that humanists use. Whereas “data” means “things given” in Latin, “capta” means “things taken.” For a more detailed discussion of capta and data in the humanities, feel free to read Johanna Drucker, “Humanities Approaches to Graphical Display,” Digital Humanities Quarterly 5 (2011): http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/5/1/000091/000091.html. We will also be reading this article for seminar.

1. BE CURIOUS.
2. FIND CAPTA that respond to your curiosity.
3. ASK A SPECIFIC QUESTION that your capta can help you examine.
4. LOCATE TOOLS and further resources that help you investigate that question.
5. PRODUCE ITERATED DELIVERABLES as you work to address your curiosity (question → capta → tools → product → question → capta → tools → product).
6. REFLECT as you go on your successes and struggles with the process.

These steps very well may not seem all that foreign, as well they should not. Producing an original argument that incorporates the analytic power of digital technologies is, in fact, like any other
academic research enterprise. There is one crucial part of the process, however, that these newer methods of academic production bring crucially to the fore, that of iteration (Step 5).

I might even go so far as to assert that it is impossible to produce a well-crafted, digitally-inflected argument in the academy without going through several iterations, that is to say several attempts to collect capta, refine it with tools, and draw meaningful conclusions from it. After all, we may reasonably expect our ideas to change as we implement our argument with any given tool, including the five-paragraph essay. We manipulate our tools, and they have also been known to then show us things that we had never considered. We could not have been perfectly right all along, of course, for if so, when would the learning have happened? As the question mutates, capta analysis and tool selection might happen again. We refine. We iterate.

Of course, this has always been the way academic arguments have been produced. There have been drafts and revisions upon drafts and revisions. But from experience, I can tell you that iteration in the digital domain is even more critical to the process of creating and presenting new academic knowledge.

**Expected Research Products**

To this end, you will be asked to expose your iterative research process in this seminar by producing multiple versions of your project, providing self-assessments, and by submitting your work frequently to peer review. Let us bring our process into view and learn how it both changes us and our relationship to the problems that we address. Each iteration will include a composition (in any appropriate, comprehensible format) that provides me with both your project deliverables, your self-evaluations, and a summary of your peers' feedback.

**First Iteration** (Due to CourseWeb by noon on Monday, October 12th)

- What is your hypothesis, thesis, or engaging line of inquiry that you would like to investigate during this course? Begin to generate or find a captaset that responds to your inquiry. In old money, we called these “sources.” In fact, we still call them that.
- **Be sure to address the following questions:** Why do you think your question would be well-served by the application of digital analytical tools? What benefits do you anticipate that your exploration of the captaset will draw from the use of such tools? Which type(s) of digital tools do you think will best serve it and why? What feedback have your peers given you so far, and how have you taken it into consideration? What are your thoughts on your process so far (a.k.a., how has it been going)?

**Second Iteration** (Due to CourseWeb by noon on Monday, November 16th)

- Produce a project with your captaset using a digital tool (or set of digital tools) especially chosen by you to help you investigate your particular question. This project will put forward a thesis, it will also provide evidence and analysis to support that thesis, and it will have a clearly-presented (even if tentative) conclusion—even if that conclusion is, “I am not succeeding in supporting my thesis, and here is a detailed explication of why…”
- **Be sure to address the following questions:** What was your process for this iteration? What have you learned about your question? What have you learned about your captaset? What have you learned about your digital tools? What feedback have your peers given you so far, and how have you taken it into consideration?
**In-Class Presentations and Peer Assessments** (Thursdays, December 10th and 17th)

- In the last two sessions, everyone will be presenting their process and iterated products to the class. You will also be producing short peer assessments of the other projects presented during these sessions. Knowing how to evaluate digital products intelligently and professionally is a critical skill in the 21st-century academy. Let us practice that skill.

**Third Iteration** (Due to CourseWeb by noon on Friday, December 18th)

- Refine your project, perhaps even using a different digital tool (or set of tools), with a refined/changed/transformed/identical captaset—whatever the project requires. The same analytic expectations will apply: there will be a thesis, evidence presented to support that thesis, analysis, and a clearly-presented conclusion—even if that conclusion is, “I am still not succeeding in supporting my thesis, and here is a detailed explication of why…”

- What did this iteration demonstrate to you? What were the joys and the frustrations? What were the ways that the technological affordances and restrictions of each tool interacted with the captaset to produce something unique? What sorts of feedback have you received from your peers and your instructors? How has this modified your process, if at all?

**Assessment**

As far as assessment goes, the following three methods of evaluation will occur throughout this seminar. Each of them should provide you with the ability to look more critically at your work and improve its clarity and depth of thought.

1. **Self-evaluations.** I have included extra questions to be answered during each iteration that are designed to keep you as self-reflective as possible throughout this process.

2. **Peer evaluations.** We will not work solely in isolation. We will give feedback to our colleagues. Before the due date for each deliverable, time will be made in class for paired peer critiques. This timing will allow you to incorporate the feedback into the work you turn in for professional evaluation. There will also be end-of-term peer assessments.

3. **Professional evaluations.** I will provide feedback and commentary on your iterations, which includes the effort and thought put into the peer and self-evaluations.

**Method of Constructing the Grade for the Registrar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITERATION</th>
<th>DUE DATE</th>
<th>WEIGHT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>Noon, Monday, October 12th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Noon, Monday, November 16th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Noon, Friday, December 18th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Assessments</td>
<td>Noon, Friday, December 18th</td>
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WEEK-BY-WEEK OVERVIEW OF SEMINAR TOPICS
In addition to weekly seminar discussion and an in-class group project, we will be having a number of distinguished, local digital scholars joining us to share their expertise. The schedule for the local luminaries’ visits is currently tentative, and is subject to change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Distinguished Visitors and Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep 03</td>
<td>Asking and Answering Questions about Humans...with the Help of Computers</td>
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<td>Sep 10</td>
<td>What is “DH™”? Assessing Questions, Methods, Implementation, and Design</td>
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<td>Sep 17</td>
<td>The Materiality of the Digital: Hardware</td>
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<td>Sep 24</td>
<td>The Materiality of the Digital: Software</td>
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<td>Oct 01</td>
<td>Asking Questions, Finding Capta</td>
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<td>Oct 08</td>
<td>Data Modeling in the Humanities</td>
<td>In-Class Group Project Begins [Iteration 1 Due Monday]</td>
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<td>Oct 15</td>
<td>Metadata and Markup [in the context of Network Analysis]</td>
<td>Elisa Beshero-Bondar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 22</td>
<td>Metadata and Markup [in the context of the Spatial Humanities]</td>
<td>Scott Weingart</td>
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<td>Oct 29</td>
<td>Tools, Tools, Tools</td>
<td>In-Class Group Project Continues</td>
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<td>Nov 05</td>
<td>Computing over Encodings [in the context of Image Analysis]</td>
<td>Tom Lombardi</td>
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<td>Nov 12</td>
<td>Visualization [in the context of Topic Modeling]</td>
<td>Benjamin Miller [Iteration 2 Due Monday]</td>
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<td>Nov 19</td>
<td>Project Management and Ongoing Preservation</td>
<td>In-Class Group Project Concludes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 03</td>
<td>Publics, Publication and Impact</td>
<td>Matthew Lavin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 10</td>
<td>Our Projects: Presentations on Process and Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 17</td>
<td>Our Projects: Presentations on Process and Product</td>
<td>[Peer Evaluations and Iteration 3 Due Friday]</td>
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Class Session Breakdown
In keeping with the balanced approach this class will be taking towards theoretical investigations and practical investigations of digital tools and methods, each class session will devote time to both principles and practice. You will note that on October 01, October 29, and November 19, we will be working in-class together on a group DH project—one that we will design and create from scratch, together.

2 Phrase thanks to Meaghan Alston, MLIS.
Week 1 (September 03)

Asking and Answering Questions about Humans…with the Help of Computers

Preparation for This Week

Week 2 (September 10)

What is “DH™?” Assessing Questions, Methods, Implementation, and Design

Preparation for This Week
1. Bring a pair of digital projects that particularly interest you to the group for discussion. Please select them from different domains of the humanities or allied social sciences.

Week 3 (17 September)

The Materiality of the Digital: Hardware

Preparation for This Week

Week 4 (24 September)

The Materiality of the Digital: Software

Preparation for This Week

### Week 5 (01 October)
**Asking Questions, Finding Capta**

#### Preparation for This Week
1. Please bring to class the question you are thinking of investigating during this seminar and the capta (or links to the capta) that you are thinking of using.

### Week 6 (08 October)
**Data Modeling in the Humanities**

IN-CLASS GROUP PROJECT BEGINS

#### Preparation for This Week

### Week 7 (15 October)
**Metadata and Markup [in the context of Network Analysis]**

#### Preparation for This Week

**Week 8 (22 October)**

*Metadata and Markup [in the context of the Spatial Humanities]*

**Preparation for This Week**


**Week 9 (29 October)**

*Tools, Tools, Tools*

*IN-CLASS GROUP PROJECT CONTINUES*

**Preparation for This Week**

1. Bring in, and be prepared to demo, one of the tools you have been investigating for your project.

**Week 10 (05 November)**

*Computing Encodings [in the context of Image Analysis]*

**Preparation for This Week**

Week 11 (12 November)
Visualization [in the context of Topic Modeling]

Preparation for This Week

Week 12 (19 November)
Project Management and Ongoing Preservation
IN-CLASS GROUP PROJECT CONCLUDES

Preparation for This Week

Week 13 (03 December)
Publics, Publication and Impact

Preparation for This Week

Other links for this project include the dataset/tool: http://rci.rutgers.edu/~ag978/quiet and the distribution of the source code for the tool: http://agoldst.github.io/dfr-browser/.

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<th>Week 14 (10 December)</th>
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<td><em>Our Projects: Presentations on Process and Product</em></td>
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**Preparation for This Week**
- Half of the class will presenting their process and products today. Those not presenting will be crafting peer assessments for their colleagues.

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