AH2230G – “Digital Tools, Digital Literacies”  
Winter 2018

Instructor: Mark McDayter  
Class Times: Mondays 4:30-6:30; Wednesdays 11:30-12:30  
Classroom: FIMS and Nursing Building, Room 2210

The advent of new technologies and online resources has revolutionized how scholars conduct and communicate research. The sheer amount of information increases exponentially each year, while new tools emerge to access, search, sift, analyze, and communicate this data. How can we best find useful research information, and how do we distinguish “information” from “data”? What kind of analysis can digital tools provide, and what can they not do? How is research communicated in a world still split between traditional print methodologies and novel digital communications tools? How can we best employ research information and the technology that enables it? How can we ensure it is not controlling us?

This course examines information systems and technologies past and present. It introduces students to a number of useful digital tools that can facilitate research, within the context of a historical understanding of how information systems have evolved and their impact upon our understanding. We will engage in a hands-on examination of databases, search engines, online archives, text mining and analysis tools; visualization, bibliography and citation software; social media, and blogging, and we will focus in particular, through community-engaged project work, upon employing markup and scripting language to build our own online tool. Students are encouraged to consider the implications of “the digital turn”: What is inside the literal and metaphorical “black boxes” that house and circulate our cultural knowledge, and how do circuit and code, hardware and software, impact how we learn, think, and communicate?
Schedule

There is a separate page on the course blog at https://ah2230digitaltools.wordpress.com/ for each week’s activities; this includes background information, resources, URLs, and readings for that week.

**Week 1 – 8-10 January, 2018**

*Course Introduction: Living in Code*

To ask “what is the future of the Humanities in a digital world” is very nearly the same as to inquire “what is the future of the human in a culture that is being effectively recalibrated through numbers and technologies.” If the overarching purpose of the Humanities is to study and explore what it means to be human, it must surely be the new imperative of our fields to examine both the potential and impact of these new digital affordances upon our society and culture, and perhaps upon our very humanity.

**Practicum:** What is code?

**Week 2 – 15-17 January, 2018**

*Lies, Damned Lies, and Data: Libraries, Archives, and Information*

The hardware and software that work together to construct the digital worlds in which we live and work are more than mere tools: they are data systems that are increasingly rewiring the way in which we receive, communicate, and understand information. Understanding how and why this is happening is a precondition to ensuring that we can use these tools effectively, and that they are not using us.

**Practicum:** Introduction to Markup: HTML 5

**Notes:**

- In-Class Introduction to Project
- Formation of project/editorial teams and text assignments

**Week 3 – 22-24 January, 2018**

*Black Boxes and Walled Gardens*

This section will begin with a brief overview of the history and development of human information systems: libraries, archives, “books,” and digital data repositories. What is data, and how does it differ from information? What is qualitative research, and what quantitative? How are these deployed, and what are their relative strengths and weaknesses? What does the paradigm shift from “information” to “data” mean for our culture, and for the Humanities?

**Practicum:** Zotero
Social media has made “curators” of us all. The provision of an ability to share, repost, reblog, and remix content of a wide variety of kinds online has engaged almost everyone who inhabits platforms as diverse as Facebook, WordPress, Twitter, and Snapchat directly in the process of digital dissemination and publication, but also of transformation. At the same time, we have all in this way come to function as elemental components of the “cloud”: replication and reproduction of content online is another form of “preservation.” How is it, then that the digital archive remains so stubbornly ephemeral and perilously perishable, and how can we ensure cultural memory in this context?

**Practicum:** Cascading Style Sheets

**Notes:**
- HTML Exercise Assigned

**Week 5 – 5-7 February, 2018**

*Digital Incunabula: W(h)ither the Book?*

Reading is going digital. While the sale of eBooks has slowed in the last couple of years, our culture has likely reached the point at which most of our reading is now being accomplished through the use of a variety of digital media. Intuitively, we all know that reading in digital formats is a “different” experience from reading print, but what are the specific implications of the explosion of digital text? Are we reading more or less? Are we reading better? How is the historically-contingent solitary experience of curling up with a book being transformed by virtual text?

**Practicum:** Site Structures, Navigation, and Images

**Week 6 – 12-16 February, 2018**

*Reading and Writing Alone Together: The Social Text*

Solitary writing and reading is, in many regards, a relatively new phenomenon; historically, “curling up with a book,” or labouring away alone at a manuscript, has had important implications for the way in which we’ve come to regard the twin acts of creation and interpretation through the lense of subjectivity. Digital affordances,
however, may be leading us back to the future. Social media, blog “comments,” platforms such as Google Doc, and applications such as Goodreads are, perhaps, challenging that subjectivity in both interesting and perhaps disturbing ways. What does our new ability to collaborate in real time mean to our understanding of such apparently fundamental and static concepts as “authorship” and “interpretation”?

**Practicum:** Introduction to Javascript and JQuery

**Notes:**
- First Iteration of Article Assignments Due

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<th>19-23 February, 2018</th>
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<td><strong>READING WEEK</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Book into Database: Digital Editions</strong></td>
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While an increasingly large amount of what we read is “born digital,” created for the new media through which we now most often engage with information, there remains, of course, an enormous tradition of texts created for other and older media such as manuscript, print, painting, performance, and oral delivery. What are the impacts of the translation of such information and texts into new forms? What does the transformative nature of virtuality do to texts produced and recorded in the context of different material conditions? How can digital “editions” of pre-digital work augment our understanding of them?

**Practicum:** Annotation Software

**Notes:**
- Peer Review of First Iteration Article by Project/Editorial Team Due
- HTML Exercise Due

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<td><strong>The Art of Not Reading: Text Analysis</strong></td>
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What we today call “close reading” is most often associated with the rise to domination of the New Criticism in the mid-20th century, but its roots are, of course, firmly planted in the older disciplines of philology and rhetorical analysis. Close reading seems, in many ways, the ultimate “human” activity: it is the engagement of one human mind and heart with the language of another. But humans are no longer the only readers of text; this is a distinction that we now share with the increasingly sophisticated software that
parses and analyses a corpus of texts that can sometimes number in the millions through search engines and algorithms. What can we learn about text from our inhuman fellow reader, the computer? What insights into meaning can “not-reading” grant us?

**Practicum:** Voyant

### Week 9 – 12-14 March, 2018

**You Are Here: Digital Maps, Digital Spaces**

Virtual and augmented realities are, in their own ways, remaking our understanding of what we mean by place. But where, in a digital and virtual context, is “here”? How does the virtual redefine meaning as it exists in a three-dimensional context, and over time? What do virtual spaces look like, and what is their relationship to “real” space? And how can virtual mapping and a digitally augmented perspective on place reveal what may lie hidden in our own lived environments?

**Practicum:** Metadata, Semantic and Structured Data Markup

**Notes:**
- Second Iteration of Article Submitted to Project/Editorial Team

### Week 10 – 19-21 March, 2018

**The Cyborg in the Mirror: Digital Identity**

Presenting “content” online necessitates the digitization of that content. Accessing most of that content similarly implies digitizing ourselves. What does it mean to project our selves and identities into digital space? Do our extensions into an online world represent empowerment, or do they “flatten” our complexity? As we read status updates, tweets, and eBooks, how are we too being “read” by the machines and their users with whom we are connecting?

**Practicum:** HTML 5 Transformations (Provisional)

**Notes:**
- Peer Review of Second Iteration Article by Project/Editorial Team Due

### Week 11 – 26-28 March, 2018

**Alice in Dataland: Digital Communities**

Even before the advent of social media, the internet had enabled new ways of connecting people and building communities. The exponential growth of these communities within the last decade has not merely changed the way in which we communicate with and relate to each other: it has nurtured the development of distinctive online cultures with their own social conventions and power structures. How have these digital communities
changed the way in which we define the public sphere? And how do our interactions in these virtual communities impact upon our sense of self, and our understanding of our place within society?

**Practicum:** *Netlytic*

**Notes:**
- Articles Due

### Week 12 – 2-4 April, 2018

**Staying Human: Digital Citizenship and the Digital Public Humanities**

If it is true that artists, musicians, film makers, and writers have embraced the potential offered by the new digital media to both experiment and reach larger public audiences than ever before, those who study and chronicle the progress of these arts have, perhaps, been slower to adapt these technologies in the service of the exploration and communication of the expression of “being human.” What potential does the digital media offer for connection with the public whom we, as Humanists, serve? How will these technologies change both the focus and the form of the public humanities? What does it mean to be a digital citizen in a public sphere that increasingly defines social connection by the quantity of “likes” and “follows” we accumulate? How can the digital humanist help us all remain “human”?

**Practicum:** *TwitterBots!*

**Notes:**
- Last week of blogging

### Week 13 – 9-11 April, 2018

**Course Conclusion: Flipping the Switch**

The advent of the “digital human” is neither a Utopian fantasy nor a dystopian nightmare: it is, in fact, the existing reality of life in the second decade of our century. We are in the process of determining, *now*, whether our digital tools will rule us, or we them. Those working, studying, thinking, and creating in the traditional fields of the Humanities have an absolutely integral role in guiding our culture(s) towards a sane relationship with the new digital worlds that we have created. By the conclusion of this course, you should have a clearer sense of the new paths we must blaze, and the pitfalls we must shun. And you will have at your own disposal new tools to make *your* voice heard in this ongoing conversation between the digital, and the human.

**Practicum:** *Going Live*

**Notes:**
- Digital Essay Due
## Evaluation

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<td>Blogging</td>
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<td>Digital Essay</td>
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**Note:** There is *no exam* for AH2230G

* 10% of the 30% assigned for the digital lecture is based on an evaluation of the entire group’s work. A further 15% is based upon an evaluation of the student’s particular contribution(s), and 5% awarded by peer evaluation (i.e., by other members of your group.

For more information on these assignments, see “Assignments: An Overview.”

Broadly speaking, this course has two primary interrelated areas of focus:

- An introduction to digital tools and associated research methodologies
- Digital literacy, including an understanding of the basic technological and social impacts of digital platforms and technologies upon identity and community

The course is also designed to introduce students to some of the fundamentals of collaborative work and project management, skills that are vital to work in both Digital Humanities and employment outside of the academy.

### Activities

Students in this course are expected to engage at all times with fellow students, and with the variety of tools and platforms that will form the primary subject of our study. This means regular participation in class discussions, online and in real time, as well as contributions in writing to class explorations of these tools and digital environments through both blog posts and comments on those of fellow students.

- Reading and/or watching all course materials before coming to class
- Participation in class discussions, the online forum, and class blogs
Creating a virtual “identity” for oneself

Building and creating using the digital tools that we will be exploring

Building an online interface and platform, using HTML 5 and associated technologies, for the online “publication” of the course research paper

Researching, writing, and building a project

Course Objectives

- Introduce the student to the main theories and concepts that are the foundation for computing, and digital and online technologies
- Explore the potential for research and analysis offered by a variety of freely-available digital tools.
- Gain an understanding of the variety and utility of the kinds of critique that the Humanities can bring to an understanding of the function and nature of the digital technologies
- Learn the basics of HTML 5 coding and some related technologies (CSS and Javascript)
- Examine the ways in which digital and online technologies impact upon personal identity and engagement with community
- Learn the critical thinking skills necessary for an informed, productive, and safe engagement with digital technologies and online venues, platforms, and communities

Learning Outcomes

- A basic understanding of how digital technologies work, and how their functions impact upon the information and data that they make available
- Understanding how to use selected digital tools in the service of research and writing
- A facility with basic HTML and associated technologies.
- Understanding how to employ online technologies to engage usefully and safely with online communities
- A better awareness of the nature of online identity, and an understanding of how to craft and design such identities
An understanding of the complicated and sometimes problematic relationship between the Humanities and digital culture and technology

Penalties for Late Work

Work should be handed in on the date specified above. Late work will be penalized at the rate of one percentage point for each working day that they are late, to a maximum of ten points. Work submitted more than two weeks late will not be accepted unless accompanied by an acceptable reason for the delay (e.g., a medical certificate; see Academic Accommodation below).

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking: The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.

Academic Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student’s Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical_document.pdf

The full policy is set out here: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf