REL 315: Digital Humanities in Religious Studies

Wednesday 3:30-5:50 pm,

Manly 210

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Office hours: Mon. 11a-12pm, Thu. 2-3pm

Course Description

This cross-disciplinary course introduces students to the methods of the digital humanities by applying those methods to the study of religion. Students will learn a variety of digital methods and tools and apply those to data drawn from religious studies. Students do not need a background in computing or religious studies.

Course Objectives

- The course will provide an introduction to digital humanities in religious studies.
- The course will introduce digital tools and platforms for research, scholarly communication, and public engagement.
- The course will discuss the current state of digital humanities in the field of religious studies.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Students analyze and review a digital humanities project.
- Students design and build a prototype digital humanities project.
- Students use content management systems to build a digital collection.

- Students produce audio that presents religious studies research to a broad public.
- Students discuss theoretical issues in the digital humanities and religious studies.

Required Software and Web Tools

- **Audacity** or **GarageBand**
- **Slack** (I recommend you download the mobile app to your phone)

Required Texts

Available from the SUPEstore and through various online sellers.

- Rockwell, Geoffrey and Stéfan Sinclar, *Hermeneutica: Computer-Assisted Interpretations in the Humanities*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (2016).

- Burdick, Anne, et al. *Digital Humanities*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (2012).

Class Requirements

- **Weekly Blogging (30%):** Each Tuesday, students must post a blog post to their own blog. The topic of the post will vary and will be given out during the class meeting prior. The posts should be between 500 and 1000 words.

- **Two Presentations (20%):** Twice during the semester you must make an informal presentation to the class. Once of these will be a review of a digital humanities project. The other will be a summary of a chapter from *Debates in the Digital Humanities*. More details on these presentations to come.

- **DH Prototype (25%):** Working with up to 2 other people, you will develop a prototype of a digital humanities project using one of the tools/skills you learned in this class. More details to come.

- **Attendance and Participation (25%):** As this is an advanced seminar, you are expected to attend the class, be prepared for the class, and participate in the class. Assignments and projects are expected to be completed on time. If you miss class for any reason please let me know promptly so we can ensure you don't fall behind. Unexcused absences, frequent tardiness, or a lack of participation will lower your grade for the course. If you have any questions or concerns about the course I am happy to talk to you.

Slack and REL 315 Blogs

Because of the nature of our course, Blackboard and its walled off system will not work for what we need to do. Instead, this blog, your student blog and our class Slack workspace will function as the main communication and content management systems.

- *REL 315 blog***:** This REL 315 WordPress blog functions as the content management system (i.e. it has the readings) and the syllabus for the course. All of the readings for the course outside of the two textbooks can be found linked on the schedule on this blog.

- **Student blog:** Each student in the course will be given a WordPress blog that is part of the REL Blogs network at **blogs.religion.ua.edu**. These blogs will be used to post your weekly writing and as a place for you to learn how WordPress and other content management systems work.

- **Slack:** The class Slack workspace can be found at **rel315.slack.com**. We will use Slack instead as a place to communicate, share, and organize the course. It will be very handy as you work on your group projects later in the semester.

Grading Scale

A+	95-100%	C	70-74
A	90-94	D+	65-69
B+	85-89	D	60-64
B	80-84	D-	50-59
C+	75-79	F	below 50

Late Work

I do not accept late work. I do give extensions in the case of extraordinary circumstances, but I expect that you will ask for the extension promptly. Do not email asking for an extension unless it is under extreme circumstances outside of your control (like a relative died over the weekend and you need to leave immediately.)

University Policies

Notification of Changes

The instructor will make every effort to follow the guidelines of this syllabus as listed; however, the instructor reserves the right to amend this document as the need arises. In such instances, the instructor will notify students in class and/or via email and will endeavor to provide reasonable time for students to adjust to any changes.

Statement on Academic Misconduct

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official **Academic Misconduct Policy** provided in the Online Catalog.

Statement On Disability Accommodations

Contact the **Office of Disability Services (ODS)** as detailed in the Online Catalog.

Severe Weather Protocol

Please see the latest **Severe Weather Guidelines** in the Online Catalog.

Pregnant Student Accommodations

Title IX protects against discrimination related to pregnancy or parental status. If you are pregnant and will need accommodations for this class, please review the University's FAQs on the **UAct website**.

Religious Observances

Under the Guidelines for Religious Holiday Observances, students should notify the instructor in writing or via email during the first two weeks of the semester of their

intention to be absent from class for religious observance. The instructor will work to provide reasonable opportunity to complete academic responsibilities as long as that does not interfere with the academic integrity of the course. See full guidelines at **Religious Holiday Observances Guidelines**.

UAct Statement

The **UAct website** provides an overview of The University's expectations regarding respect and civility.

Schedule

8/21 Introductions

In class:

- Introduction to each other
- Introduction to the course
- Introduction to WordPress
- Introduction to Slack

8/28 What is Digital Humanities?

Before class:

- *Digital_Humanities* Ch.1-2, "A Portfolio of Case Studies"
- **"What Is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?"** Matthew Kirschenbaum
- Make sure you're on the Slack
- Finish setting up your blog

In class:

- Discussion of readings

9/4 How Should We Do Digital Humanities?

Before class:

- *Digital_Humanities* Ch.4, "A Short Guide to the Digital_Humanities"
- **"Day of DH: Defining the Digital Humanities"**

In class:

- Discussion of readings
- Work in groups to develop definitions of Digital Humanities

9/11 Digital Humanities in Religious Studies

Before class:

- **"Religion, Media, and the Digital Turn,"** p.2-40. Christopher D. Cantwell and Hussein Rashid
- Don't read the appendices but you may browse them for ideas for future assignments.
- **"Digital Humanities and the Study of Religion,"** Tim Hutchings
- "Learning to Code: Digital Pebbles and Institutional Ripples," Russell McCutcheon (pre-publication draft will be posted to Slack)
- **"AAR Guidelines for Evaluating Digital Scholarship"**
- **"A Modest Proposal for the AAR's Guidelines for Evaluating Digital Scholarship,"** Nathan Loewen

In class:

- Discussion of readings

9/18 Digital Collections

Before class:

- **"Digital Historiography and the Archives"**, Kate Theimer, et al. (read all the essays in the roundtable)
- Explore **American Religious Sounds Project**

In class:

- Discussion of readings/ARSP
- Introduce Omeka

9/25 Omeka

Before class:

- **Up and Running with Omeka.net**
- **Creating an Omeka exhibit**
- Build an Omeka.net website with a digital collection. If you can, make it somehow related to your interests in the study of religion. The actual items are not very important, learning the process of building the collection is the focus. Your Omeka site should have at least 5 items, two collections, and one exhibit. The exhibit should include an at least 250 word essay along with the items. Start working on your collections before class but you don't have to finish it. If you run into problems or get stumped then bring your questions/problems to class.

In class:

- Finish Omeka websites.

10/2 Introducing Text Analysis with Voyant Tools

Before class:

- *Hermeneutica* Ch. 1-4
- Companion to ch. 4 at **hermeneuti.ca**

In class:

- Discussion of the reading

10/9 How to Write With Digital Toys

Before class:

- *Hermeneutica* Ch. 5-6

In class:

- Discussion of the readings

10/16 Big Data

Before class:

- *Hermeneutica* Ch. 7-8

In class:

- Discussion of the readings

10/23 Theory and Interpretation of Texts

Before class:

- *Hermeneutica* Ch. 9-11

  In class:

- Discussion of readings

  10/30 Introducing Podcasting

  Before class:

- **"Podcasting religious studies,"** Michael J. Altman
- **"The Simple Guide to Academic Podcasting,"** Cherly Brumley
- Find one good example of a podcast that you can briefly share with the class. Post the URL in the Slack.

  In class:

- Discuss readings
- Listen to podcast examples
- Introduce Audacity/Garageband

  11/6 Making a Podcast

  Before class:

- Working with a partner from class, begin to write a script and produce a 2-minute mini-podcast that explains one key term in the academic study of religion. You don't have to finish the podcast before class, we will work on it in class, but get started enough that you have good questions and plan of action when you get to class.

  In class:

- Finish mini-podcasts

  11/13 Planning a DH Prototype

  Before class:

- Figure out your group for the final prototype project and post the names of the group members on Slack before class. Use slack or meet in person to begin planning what you want to do.

  In class:

- Discuss, plan, and begin building prototypes.

11/20 Building a Prototype

Before class:

- Continue working and communicating with your group, in person or via Slack.

  In class:

- Work on prototypes

12/4 Prototype Presentations

Before class:

- Post any URLs or files you'll need to present your prototype to the class Slack for easy access.

  In class:

- Present prototypes
- Discuss how prototypes could be extended
- Celebrate what you built!