



Digital Texts in the Humanities

REL 370-001 | Sp 2021 | 3 Credit Hours

Jeri E. Wieringa, PhD

Email: jewieringa@ua.edu

Office: Presidents Hall (Manly Hall), 315B

Where we meet: PRH 210

Ways to Reach Me

Come to office hours:

M (Virtual only): 2-4pm

Th (in person): 11am-1pm

Or you can chat with me via Google Hangouts - jeri.elizabeth@gmail.com

How this Course Helps You Graduate

This course is an upper division seminar and fulfills one of your REL requirements.

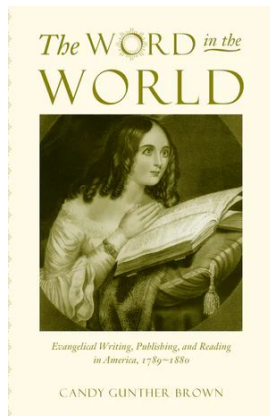
Course Description

How does Google know word frequencies from 1850 –

<https://books.google.com/ngrams?> How might scholars use machines to read differently?

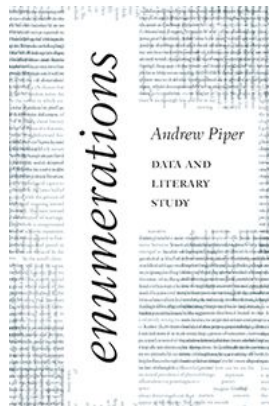
This course explores digital texts: how they're made and the questions we can ask with and about them. We'll assemble and analyze a digital corpus, learn some computer programming, and discuss the implications of treating words as data.

Required Texts



Candy Gunther Brown,
*The Word in the World:
Evangelical Writing,
Publishing, and Reading
in America, 1789-1880.*

The University of
North Carolina
Press, 2004



Andrew Piper,
*Enumerations: Data
and Literary Studies.*

The University of
Chicago Press,
2018.

Additionally, there are optional readings from Katherine Bode's *A World of Fiction: Digital Collections and the Future of Literary History*. This book is available [as a digital edition through the UA library](#).

All other readings will be available through Blackboard.

Course Objectives

This course will focus on the following:

- Understanding texts as technology, with different affordances in different media
- Introduce students to practices in computational text analysis

Student Learning Outcomes

This course is structured to teach the following:

- Students will **examine** texts as technology.
- Students will **identify** the issues involved in transforming physical media into digital media.
- Students will **demonstrate** and **evaluate** methods for transforming digital files into data.
- Students will **demonstrate** and **evaluate** methods for finding patterns in textual data.

Things to Remember When Learning Technical Skills

This is not a contest: If you finish early, watch the chat to see who needs help.

You are not bad at technology: “technology” is many things and uses many skills. It is very unlikely you are bad at all of them.

Your mistake is almost invariably minor (and that's ok): don't give up in frustration if you can't find a file or make something work. Step away, ask for help, it will come.

We do not sink or swim: We are in this together.

Technology

For this course we are going to be using a shared [WordPress blog](#), Blackboard, and a platform called for [CoCalc](#). You will receive invitations to join the WordPress site and CoCalc at your Alabama email address.

Assignments and Grading

Reading Responses

Over the course of the semester, you will need to write a blog post on the course website that provides a synopsis of the reading for the week, discusses how the reading for the week connects to the other readings and themes for the course, and poses two to three questions for discussion for the class. This will be due by **midnight Sunday** before the class period when we discuss that reading, to give your classmates time to respond.

Additionally, you will need to respond via the comments to the weekly blog post (on weeks when you are not the main post author) **at least 8 times** over the course of the semester. These comments should be substantive (“I agree” is not enough) and should move the conversation forward.

Your first, second, and third choices for which week you wish to blog are due to me by email, Friday, January 22.

“Data Biography” of a Digital Texts Archive

This concept comes from [We All Count](#), but I am modifying it for working with archival collections rather than survey and statistical data.

In your biography of your archive, you will identify:

- the **who** (who collected and organized the data? Who owns the data? Who digitized the data?),
- the **what** (what types of sources are being digitized and distributed? What is the selection criteria? How does what is digitized compare to what is not digitized?),
- the **when** (over what span of time was the archive developed? Is the work still on going?),
- the **where** (where are the original documents? Where are the digital files stored?),
- the **why** (what are the goals of the digital archive? Who is the intended audience? How are they expected to use the resources),
- the **how** (what technologies are they using to digitize the physical material? What platforms are they using for distribution? How can the data be accessed and in what formats?)

Your biographies should be written with complete sentences and good grammar, with approximately one paragraph per question (you can combine if needed for narrative flow). Additional requirements will be posted on Blackboard.

Your biographies should be posted to the class blog by the start of class on **February 9th**. We will use the class period to discuss your findings, so be prepared to give a brief summary.

Your first, second, and third choices for which archive you wish to evaluate are due by email, Friday, January 22.

Digital Texts Archives:

[HathiTrust](#)

[Chronicling America](#)

[Digital Public Library of America](#)

[Perseus Digital Library](#)

[Gale Nineteenth Century Collections Online](#) (Choose one. Preferably one that UA subscribes to.)

[Digital Library of the Middle East](#)

[World Digital Library](#)

[Europeana](#)

Other - Send me the link and say why you would like to investigate this particular archive.

Digitization Project

For your second project, you will practice with the craft of digitization for archival and research purposes. You will need to assemble a collection of 5 physical texts, each at least 5 pages long but no more than 20. For this project, you are going to have to manage a number of issues, such as file naming, types of digital files, scanning resolution, derivative files, color and size reference, scanning methods, text recognition, and metadata.

Don't panic! We will work in class to construct a pipeline that you will work your texts through. Your final files, with a brief description of the sources and your methods, will be due by the start of class on **March 9**.

We will go over this assignment in further detail in class and the requirements will be posted on Blackboard.

Text Analysis Project

For your third project, using the text you digitized, or text from another digital archive, you will submit a Jupyter notebook that poses three questions of the digital texts and attempts to answer those questions using different computational algorithms. The notebook should also provide a written assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the algorithms for providing insight into the texts.

A draft of your project is due at the start of class on **April 20** for in-class feedback. The final draft is due **midnight on April 30**.

We will go over this assignment in further detail in class and the requirements will be posted on Blackboard.

Technical Notebooks

As we move into learning more technical skills, we will practice using Python in a web-hosted environment called CoCalc. Starting in March, you will receive a “notebook” that you will use during class to practice different technical skills. Any work that you do not finish in class will be due at the end of week - by midnight Friday.

We will go over this in detail in class.

Grading Scale

Response Comments and Notebooks

Your comments on the weekly reading response blog post and your notebooks will be graded on completion (-, ✓, +).

95% completion (8+ substantive comments) (✓ or +)	100 points
85% completion (7 substantive comments) (✓ or +)	90 points
75% completion (6 substantive comments) (✓ or +)	75 points
65% completion (5 substantive comments) (✓ or +)	50 points
< 65% completion (< 5 substantive comments) (✓ or +)	0 points

Projects and Reading Response Post

Your three projects and your reading response post will be graded as follows:

+	Excellent. Assignment exceeded many of the requirements	200 points
✓+	Very Good. Assignment meets the requirements	180 points
✓	Sufficient. Assignment meets some of the requirements	150 points
-	Insufficient. Assignment does not meet the requirements	100 points
0	Not submitted	0 points

Final Grades

There are 1000 total points available.

A+	1000-980
A	979-900
B+	899-880
B	879-800
C+	799-780
C	779-700
D+	699-680
D	679-600
F	< 600

Elasticity Statement

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

Course Expectations and University Policies

Attendance Policy

Class attendance and participation in the course discussion is a central component of the learning experience of this course. You have **two unexcused absences** that you can use without question. Beyond that, please contact me if you need to miss class due to illness or other unavoidable event.

Late Work

The course work is designed to help you prepare for class and to keep you on track for the final project. As a general rule, I do not accept late work.

Please email me in cases of illness or other unavoidable event.

University and College Policies

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

The University of Alabama is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and need reasonable accommodation(s) to participate in this class, contact the Office of Disability Services (or ODS; 205-348-4285, ods@ua.edu, Houser Hall 1000, www.ods.ua.edu) as soon as possible. If you have been approved to receive accommodations through ODS, please meet with me during office hours or by appointment to submit your accommodation letter and discuss how accommodations can be implemented in this course.

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.

Severe Weather Protocol

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

UAct Statement

The University of Alabama is committed to an ethical, inclusive community defined by respect and civility. The UAct website (www.ua.edu/uact) provides extensive information on how to report or obtain assistance with a variety of issues, including issues related to dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, sexual violence or other Title IX violations, illegal discrimination, harassment, hate or bias incidents, child abuse or neglect, hazing, threat assessment, retaliation, and ethical violations or fraud.

Statement on COVID-19

All University faculty, staff, and students are expected to maintain a commitment to the health and safety of our campus community. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, specific health and safety standards are in place to minimize exposure and community spread on campus. In the interest of your health and safety and that of all UA students, faculty and staff, the University reserves the right to change the mode of instruction or schedule of instruction at any time, based upon prevailing public health and other guidance. While the method of delivery may change, educational instruction and opportunities will continue. As such, the University will not provide a refund of tuition, in whole or in-part, based on any such changes. Detailed information on changes in format or schedule can be found at studentaccounts.ua.edu and financialaid.ua.edu.

All students must be familiar with and abide by the requirements outlined in the UA Return Plan | UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan. Students must (1) wear a mask or face covering at all times while participating in face-to-face class; (2) adhere to social distancing standards; and (3) comply with all other health and safety restrictions. If a student refuses to comply with the requirements, the student will be asked to leave the class and reported for a conduct violation. Unless a student has an exemption from the requirement to wear a face covering, (more information can be found at ods.ua.edu/covid-19-disability/), the student will be reported to Student Life for further disciplinary action. More information on these requirements and UA Healthcheck system and screening can be found at healthinfo.ua.edu/returnplan. You are expected to visit the site and comply with all noted requirements related to in-person class attendance.

Schedule

Week 1 | January 19

Topic: Welcome, Syllabus, What is Text?

Texts as Technologies

Week 2 | January 26

Topic: Print in American religions traditions

Read before class:

- *The Word in the World*, ch.1 & 2
- **optional:** chapters 3 & 4

Week 3 | February 2

Topic: Text in Protestant religious practice

Read before class:

- *The World in the World*, ch. 5 & 6
- **optional:** chapters 7 & 8

Week 4 | February 9

“Data Biography” of Archive of Digital Texts Due

Share your findings about your digital archive

From Analog to Digital

Week 5 | February 16

Topic: What are the challenges with digital texts

Read before class:

- Rosenzweig, “Scarcity or Abundance: Preserving the Past in a Digital Age”
- Witmore, [“Text: A Massively Addressable Object”](#)
- **optional:** *A World of Fiction*, Intro and chapter 1

Week 6 | February 23

Topic: Hands on Scanning Exercise

Read before class:

- [“Minimum Digitization Capture Recommendations”](#)

Week 7 | March 2

Topic: Building a corpus for a research question

Read before class:

- *Enumerations*, intro and ch. 1
- **optional:** *A World of Fiction*, ch. 2 & 3

Week 8 | March 9

Digitization Project Due

Discuss findings and lingering questions

Finding Patterns in Digital Texts

Week 9 | March 16

Topic: Intro to Jupyter | Loading texts

Read before class:

- *Enumerations*, ch. 2
- **optional:** Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature”

Week 10 | March 23

Topic: Counting Words (what are words)

Read before class:

- *Enumerations*, ch. 3
- **optional:** *A World of Fiction*, ch. 4

Week 11 | March 30

Topic: Counting Words, continued.

Read before class:

- *Enumerations*, ch. 4
- **optional:** *A World of Fiction*, ch. 5

Week 12 | April 6

Topic: Tagging Words

Read before class:

- *Enumerations*, ch. 5
- **optional:** *A World of Fiction*, ch. 6

Week 13 | April 13

Topic: Linking Words and Documents

Read before class:

- *Enumerations*, ch. 6

Week 14 | April 20

Text Analysis Project, Draft Due

Present analysis draft to class for feedback

Finals Week

Text Analysis Project, Final Draft, Due Midnight April 30th.