Digital Methods for the Study of Religion

REL 503-002 | F-2022 | 3 Credit Hours

Dr. Jeri E. Wieringa

Email: jewieringa@ua.edu
Office: Presidents Hall 303

Course Details

Location: Presidents Hall 307
Dates and Times: 10am - 3pm
- September 30 - October 1
- November 4 - 5

Contact Information:

Your learning in this course depends on your participation. Please let me know in advance if you cannot make class. If your semester goes sideways, please talk to me early and often so that I can best support you.

You can reach me by email at any point - I will respond within 24 hours M-F and within 48 hours over the weekend.

I will also be in my office from **1:30 to 3pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays**, and you are welcome to stop by to chat about class, navigating the university, about most anything.

Or you can make an appointment for a guaranteed block of time using Microsoft Bookings - https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/OfficeHoursforJeriWieringa@ua.edu/bookings/

Course Description

Computation has transformed all aspects of our day to life, and scholarship is no exception. This class will teach you basic technical skills so that you can effectively evaluate and apply computational methods in your work.

The course is structured into two weekend workshops, with a series of coding exercises for you to complete. On the last day of classes, you will submit a final short essay reflecting on potential uses of digital methods in your research.

Technology

Please plan to bring a laptop to class. Before the workshop, please back up your files and upgrade your operating system to the most up-to-date version you can.

If you do not have a laptop, you can use the lab computers in PRH 307.

Course Objectives

This course will focus on the following:
- introduce fundamental skills and concepts in the digital humanities
- apply those skills and concepts to students' research areas
- evaluate how the methods of the digital humanities can advance students' academic interests.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students are expected to be able to do the following by the end of the course:
1. **Use** the command-line interface to interact with their computer
2. **Use** computational thinking to create a short animated sequence
3. **Recognize** and **Apply** key coding concepts
4. **Design** a "splash page" for a personal webpage
5. **Combine** HTML and CSS to create a personal webpage
6. **Publish** a webpage using Github Pages

Assignments and Grading

1. Coding Exercises (15 points each)

There will be 6 coding exercises that you will complete for the two workshops. Details for each will be published on the course website.

a. Command Line Challenge (Due Oct. 1)
b. Scratch Program (Due Oct. 7)
c. Jupyter Notebook (Due Oct. 14)
d. Splash Page Design (Due Nov. 5)
e. HTML and CSS document (Due Nov. 18)
f. Published Web Page (Due Nov. 18)

2. Reflection Paper (10 points)

You will submit a final reflection paper on the application of computational methods to their research. This paper, 500 - 750 words in length, should consider how computational tools connect to your research and scholarly agenda.

If you are interested in using computational methods, identify a potential research question and decompose it as best you can into a series of steps that you will need to work through, as well as identify the type of data you will need in order to address the question(s).

If you are not interested in using computational methods yourself, reflect on how you might evaluate the computationally-driven work of others. What would you need to know (personally and about the work being evaluated) in order to assess arguments that rely on computation.

Due December 2

Grading Scale

I grade on completion of the assignments, so you will earn full points if you fulfill all of the requirements on time. I give additional points for work that exceeds expectations.

I want you to achieve the learning outcomes of the course, so the assignments and my feedback are focused on helping you develop the skills you need to succeed.

Final Grading Scale

Total Points	Letter Grade
100+	A+
90-100	A
80-90	B
70-80	C
60-70	D
< 60	F

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

Respect for Material, Subjects, and Peers

We will be discussing topics related that may present viewpoints that are counter to your personal beliefs or that ask you to consider alternative explanations for things you value. This may be difficult and uncomfortable. I ask that you accept that tension and allow yourself to be challenged.

Additionally, our topics of study may result in some uncomfortable conversations. I expect you to be civil and polite in your communication, both in class and outside of it. Treat all those you interact with, both historical actors and your peers, with respect.

Attendance Policy

Class attendance and participation in the course discussion is a central component of the learning experience of this course. You have 1 unexcused absence that you can use without question. After that, your grade will drop 5 points for every additional absence.

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 unless arrangements are made with me in advance.

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.

Wellness Resources

College can be a stressful time.

If you or someone you know is facing a challenging time or dealing with academic or personal stress, anxiety, depression, or other concerns, we strongly encourage and support you to seek assistance or to help friends find the care that they may need.

Also, If you are experiencing a personal crisis and need urgent assistance, you can also contact the following resources:

Counseling Center
- Monday-Friday during routine Center hours (205-348-3863).
- Weekends, holidays, after-hours (contact UAPD at 205-348-5454 and ask to speak with the on-call counselor).
- You may also text BAMA to 741-741 to text with a trained volunteer.

Women and Gender Resource Center
- Monday-Friday during routine Center hours (205-348-5040).
- Weekends, holidays, after-hours (contact UAPD at 205-348-5454 and ask to speak to the on-call advocate for the WGRC.

Schedule

Workshop 1: Computational Thinking

Read before:
- Borgman, Christine L. "The Digital Future Is Now: A Call to Action for the Humanities." *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 003, no. 4 (March 20, 2010). http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/3/4/000077/000077.html
- Wing, Jeannette. "Viewpoint | Computational Thinking." *Communication of the ACM*, March 2006. http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~./15110-s13/Wing06-ct.pdf.

September 30: Introductions to computational thinking and to your computers
October 1: Programming basics for the humanities scholar

Workshop 2: Web Technologies

Read before:
- Zeldman, Jeffrey. "Understanding Web Design." A List Apart. Accessed August 30, 2011. http://www.alistapart.com/articles/understandingwebdesign/.
- "Designing Texts" from Faigley, Lester, Diana George, Anna Palchik, and Cynthia Selfe. *Picturing Texts*. Illustrated edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004. **(PDF on Blackboard)**

November 4: Organizing Information and HTML
November 5: Creating Designs with CSS and Publishing to the Web