



Digital Humanities in Religious Studies

REL 315-001 | F2022 | 3 Credit Hours

Dr. Jeri E. Wieringa

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Office: Presidents Hall 303

Course Details

Location: Presidents Hall 210

Time: 3:30-5:50pm Tuesdays

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, DH, navigating the university, about most anything.

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

This cross-disciplinary course introduces students to the theoretical concerns and methods of the digital humanities by examining how those methods have been applied to the study of religion and beyond. Students will consider the affordances and limitations of computational technologies for the study of culture, while gaining a range of technical skills. Students do not need a background in computing or religious studies.

Technology

I will keep track of your assignments in Blackboard, so that you have a view of due dates and your grades as we work through the semester.

We will also be using two web platforms for this course:

- WordPress - <https://blogs.religion.ua.edu/rel315/>
- Scalar - <https://scalar.me/anvc/>

You will receive an invitation to create an account in WordPress at the beginning of the course. Please be on the look out for this email invitation and contact me promptly if you have trouble.

We will create our Scalar accounts halfway through the semester.

Primary Texts

Lupi, Giorgia, and Stefanie Posavec. *Observe, Collect, Draw!: A Visual Journal*. Illustrated edition. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2018. (Purchase at the bookstore or online.)

Drucker, Johanna. *The Digital Humanities Coursebook: An Introduction to Digital Methods for Research and Scholarship*. London: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106531>. (Available as PDF through Blackboard.)

Course Objectives

This course will focus on the following:

- introducing students to the theories and methods of the digital humanities
- introducing students to the ethics of acquiring, analyzing, interpreting, and presenting data within the context of religious studies
- providing students opportunities to apply theories and methods from digital humanities to religion “data”
- presenting data as contested, complex, and ethically charged

Student Learning Outcomes

Students are expected to be able to do the following by the end of the course:

1. **Identify** and **Produce** data for the study of religion in culture
2. **Describe** digital objects in terms of data, analysis, and presentation
3. **Develop** technical skills for creating digital objects
4. **Create** a digital essay
5. **Reflect** on their work and learning

Assignments and Grading

1. Weekly Assignments: **20 points**

- **Readings Journal: 10 points**
 - Writing good reading notes is a necessary skill and since we have multiple essays for each class, it will help you keep your ideas organized.
 - Details on what the entries should include will be posted on Blackboard.
 - I will check your reading journals 3 times over the semester. Please bring them to class on the following days:
 - September 20
 - October 25
 - November 29
- **Participation: 10 points**
 - Your participation grade reflects attendance, engagements in class, and completion of various additional tasks of the course.

2. Skills Labs: **20 points**

Throughout the semester there will be 10 lab assignments, due the Friday after class. These will build on the skills or concepts that we discuss on Tuesday. Details for the labs will be posted on WordPress and Blackboard before the Tuesday class.

We have a busy semester, so to give you a little flexibility, you have two free passes. Full points will be given if 8/10 labs are submitted and are complete.

3. Data Diaries: **20 points**

(Due Friday, September 23)

The challenge with digital humanities is we have to start thinking about the world in terms of data, which can be a stretch for those of us who are used to working in the world of texts and ideas. But seeing data is not necessarily something that needs a computer. Rather, it is a way of observing yourself and the things around you.

Using *Observe, Collect, Draw!*, you will complete three guided activities of your choice. The only constraint is that they need to be of different time durations. Details will be posted.

4. Dataset and Datasheet: **20 points**

(Due Friday, October 21)

In preparation for your final project, your second project is to create a dataset for investigating a research question related to religion and culture. Details will be posted.

5. Final Project - Digital Essay in Scalar: **30 points**

(Due Thursday, December 8)

Your final project will be a digital essay, posted in Scalar, that uses your dataset and the digital methods that we go over in class to explore your research question. Details will be posted.

Grading Policy

I grade on completion of the assignments, so you will earn full points if you fulfill all of the requirements on time. Each assignment will include a self-evaluation.

I give additional points for work that exceeds expectation and I take your self-evaluation into consideration.

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+
92-100	A
90-92	A-
88-90	B+
82-88	B
80-82	B-
78-80	C+
72-78	C

70-72	C-
68-70	D+
62-68	D
60-62	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 two unexcused absences that you can use without question. After that, your participation grade will drop one point for each additional unexcused absence.

Please contact me before class if you will be absent 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.

Health and COVID-19

Your health is important. Please let me know beforehand if you need to miss class because you are sick or have caregiving responsibilities. If you need to miss more than 3 classes, please be in touch with me so that we can determine how best to continue.

You are welcome but not required to wear masks in class. Please be respectful of the choices of your peers.

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

August 23

Welcome to REL 315 - Religion and the Digital Humanities.

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete the Computer Skills Inventory (on Blackboard)
- Complete the Computer Maintenance checklist (on Blackboard)
- Create an account on the course WordPress site and create a post introducing yourself (details on Blackboard)

August 24

Last Day to Add / Drop Course

August 30

Skills Week: Working with Data

Read before class:

- **Chapter 2, part a.** Drucker, Johanna. *The Digital Humanities Coursebook: An Introduction to Digital Methods for Research and Scholarship*. London: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106531>.
- **Introduction.** Lupi, Giorgia, and Stefanie Posavec. *Observe, Collect, Draw!: A Visual Journal*. Illustrated edition. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2018.

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete Lab 1 and post on WordPress.

September 6

Religion and DH: The Big Tent of DH

Read before class:

- Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. "What Is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?" *ADE Bulletin*, 2010, 55–61. <https://doi.org/10.1632/ade.150.55>.
- Hockey, Susan. "The History of Humanities Computing." In *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, 2004. <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405103213/9781405103213.xml&chunk.id=ss1-2-1&toc.depth=1&toc.id=ss1-2-1&brand=default>.
- Leon, Sharon. "Complicating a 'Great Man' Narrative of Digital History in the United States." In *Bodies of Information*, 2018.

<https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled-4e08b137-aec5-49a4-83c0-38258425f145/section/53838061-eb08-4f46-ace0-e6b15e4bf5bf>.

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete Lab 2 and post on WordPress

September 13

Religion and DH: Does it even work?

Read before class:

- Maffly-Kipp, Laurie F. "Putting Religion on the Map." Edited by Andrew Walsh, Mark Silk, Randall Balmer, Philip Barlow, Jan Shipps, Patricia O'Connell Killen, Wade Clark Roof, Charles Reagan Wilson, and William Lindsey. *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 2 (2007): 522–29. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25094964>.
- Mullen, Lincoln. "Where the Problem with Historical Data about U.S. Religion Really Lies." *lincolnmullen.com*, January 1, 2016. <https://lincolnmullen.com/blog/where-the-problem-with-historical-data-about-u-s-religion-really-lies/>.
- Cantwell, Christopher D., and Kristian Petersen. "Digital Humanities and Religious Studies: A 'Why' To Guide." In *Digital Humanities and Religious Studies: A "Why" To Guide*, vii–xx. De Gruyter, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110573022-001>.

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete Lab 3 and post on WordPress

September 20

Critical DH: What is Data Anyway?

Bring your reading journals to class for a quick check.

Read before class:

- Drucker, Johanna. "Humanities Approaches to Graphical Display" 5, no. 1 (2011). <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/5/1/000091/000091.html>.
- Posner, Miriam. "Humanities Data: A Necessary Contradiction." *Miriam Posner's Blog* (blog), 2015. <http://miriamposner.com/blog/humanities-data-a-necessary-contradiction/>.
- Johnson, Jessica Marie. "Black [Life] Studies and Slavery [Death] Studies at the Digital Crossroads." *Social Text*, 2018, 24. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-7145658>

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete and submit your **Data Diaries assignment**

September 27

Skills Week: Dissecting Digital Projects

Read before class:

- **Chapter 1, part b.** Drucker, Johanna. *The Digital Humanities Coursebook: An Introduction to Digital Methods for Research and Scholarship*. London: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106531>.
- “How Did They Make That? – Miriam Posner’s Blog.” Accessed August 12, 2022. <https://miriamposner.com/blog/how-did-they-make-that/>.

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete Lab 4 and post on WordPress

October 4

DH Methods: Encoding

Read before class:

- **Chapter 4.** Drucker, Johanna. *The Digital Humanities Coursebook: An Introduction to Digital Methods for Research and Scholarship*. London: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106531>.
- Duarte, Marisa Elena, and Miranda Belarde-Lewis. “Imagining: Creating Spaces for Indigenous Ontologies.” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 53, no. 5–6 (July 4, 2015): 677–702. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2015.1018396>.

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete Lab 5 and post on WordPress

October 11

DH Methods: Visualization

Read before class:

- **Chapter 6.** Drucker, Johanna. *The Digital Humanities Coursebook: An Introduction to Digital Methods for Research and Scholarship*. London: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106531>.
- Gibbs, Frederick W. “New Forms of History: Critiquing Data and Its Representations.” *The American Historian*, February 2016. <http://tah.oah.org/february-2016/new-forms-of-history-critiquing-data-and-its-representations/>.

- Lauren F. Klein. "The Image of Absence: Archival Silence, Data Visualization, and James Hemings." *American Literature* 85, no. 4 (2013): 661–88.
<https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-2367310>.

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete Lab 6 and post on WordPress

October 18

Critical DH: Data Privacy, Sovereignty, and Open Access

Read before class:

- **Chapter 12, b.** Drucker, Johanna. *The Digital Humanities Coursebook: An Introduction to Digital Methods for Research and Scholarship*. London: Routledge, 2021.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106531>.
- Marwick, Alice E. "How Your Data Are Being Deeply Mined." *The New York Review of Books*, January 9, 2014.
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/01/09/how-your-data-are-being-deeply-mined/>.
- Rainie, Stephanie Carroll, Jennifer Lee Schultz, Eileen Briggs, Patricia Riggs, and Nancy Lynn Palmanteer-Holder. "Data as a Strategic Resource: Self-Determination, Governance, and the Data Challenge for Indigenous Nations in the United States." *International Indigenous Policy Journal* 8, no. 2 (March 10, 2017).
<https://doi.org/10.18584/iipj.2017.8.2.1>.
- Anderson, Talea, and David Squires. "Open Access and the Theological Imagination." *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 011, no. 4 (December 22, 2017).
<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/11/4/000340/000340.html>

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete and submit your **Data and Datasheet Project**

October 25

Skills: Using a Content Management System

Bring your reading journals to class for a quick check.

Read before class:

- **Chapter 11.** Drucker, Johanna. *The Digital Humanities Coursebook: An Introduction to Digital Methods for Research and Scholarship*. London: Routledge, 2021.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106531>.
- Earhart, Amy E. "Can We Trust the University? Digital Humanities Collaborations with Historically Exploited Cultural Communities." In *Bodies of Information*. Debates in Digital Humanities. University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

<https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled-4e08b137-aec5-49a4-83c0-38258425f145/section/c449610c-af71-4373-9359-0eb138a15d51>.

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete Lab 7 and post on WordPress

October 26

Last Day to Drop the Course with a grade of “W”

November 1

DH Methods: Mining

Read before class:

- **Chapter 7.** Drucker, Johanna. *The Digital Humanities Coursebook: An Introduction to Digital Methods for Research and Scholarship*. London: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106531>.
- Underwood, Ted. “A Genealogy of Distant Reading.” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 011, no. 2 (June 27, 2017). <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/11/2/000317/000317.html>.

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete Lab 8 and post on WordPress

November 8

DH Methods: Modeling and Machine Learning/AI

Reading before class:

- **Chapter 9.** Drucker, Johanna. *The Digital Humanities Coursebook: An Introduction to Digital Methods for Research and Scholarship*. London: Routledge, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003106531>.
- Schmidt, Benjamin M. “48. Do Digital Humanists Need to Understand Algorithms? | Benjamin M. Schmidt’ in ‘Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016’ on Manifold.” *Debates in the Digital Humanities*. Accessed July 3, 2020. <https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled/section/557c453b-4abb-48ce-8c38-a77e24d3f0bd#ch48>.
- Randall Reed. “A.I. in Religion, A.I. for Religion, A.I. and Religion: Towards a Theory of Religious Studies and Artificial Intelligence.” *Religions* 12, no. 401 (May 1, 2021): 401–401. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060401>.

Homework (due Friday)

- Complete Lab 9 and post on WordPress

November 15

Critical DH: Big Data and the Rise of Data Science

Watch before class:

- *Coded Bias* (Available on Netflix. Screening to be scheduled.)

Read before class:

- boyd, danah, and Kate Crawford. "Critical Questions for Big Data." *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (June 1, 2012): 662–79.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.678878>.
- Bender, Emily M., Timnit Gebru, Angelina McMillan-Major, and Shmargaret Shmitchell. "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?" In *Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, 610–23. FAccT '21. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3442188.3445922>.

Homework

- Complete Lab 10 and post on WordPress

November 22

Thanksgiving Break

November 29

REL and the Digital Humanities

Bring your reading journals to class for a final check.

Read before class:

- Risam, Roopika. "Decolonizing the Digital Humanities in Theory and Practice." In *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities*. Routledge, 2018.
<http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.13013/421>
- Smith, Jonathan Z. "Religion, Religions, Religious" (PDF on Blackboard)

Homework

- Work on Final Projects (Due Dec. 8)

December 2

Last Day to Withdraw from the Course

December 8

Scheduled Final Exam Period

Final Projects due at the end of the day