CMPU 187
Introduction to Digital Humanities
Spring 2021

Wednesday & Friday, 1:30–2:45 p.m.
Sanders Classroom 006 and Zoom

Prof. Jonathan Gordon

cs.vassar.edu/~cs187

This syllabus is a plan, not a contract. This is an unusual semester, and I want us to work together to find the best way for you to learn.

Overview

What could we discover if we read thousands of books? What would we learn if we tracked the word choices of a poet throughout their life? How would it change our understanding of a novel if we mapped the characters' movements? This course explores the theory and practice of using computational methods to illuminate questions in the humanities, with an emphasis on the role of data in literary studies. Readings, discussion, and hands-on practice facilitate engagement with computational methods and their application in the context of scholarly research.

Prerequisites

This course does not assume any prior experience with computational methods, but students should be willing to experiment with new skills.

Course goals

By the end of the semester, you should understand:

- what the term "digital humanities" means in different disciplines,

- how common digital tools work and examples of projects using them,

- how to create, gather, and organize data, and

- how to analyze and visualize textual data.

Course format

This course uses a synchronous hybrid format: The course meetings will simultaneously take place face-to-face with social distancing and live-streamed on Zoom.

Meetings are recorded for asynchronous viewing, and you can also ask questions and discuss the material online. You are free to opt out of the face-to-face meeting and participate online, synchronously or asynchronously, at any time.

The calendar with lecture notes, assigned readings and exercises is on the course website and will be updated throughout the semester.

Course expectations

This course is offered ungraded. However, success in the course is more than passing: It means that you are being challenged to grow as a learner, that you are actively engaging with tasks that feed your growth, and that you are creating excellent work by completing challenging tasks with an appropriate level of support. It also means that you are building your lifelong learning skills so that once the course is over, you are better and stronger as a learner and can continue to learn new things independently.

Participation

There will be few lectures and we are not building toward an exam. Rather, we will work together to build our facilities for thinking critically about the application of computational methods in the humanities. You should come to every class having read all of the required reading, watched the required videos, browsed the suggested resources, and so forth. You should enter the classroom prepared to discuss these materials and complete both individual and group in-class assignments.

There are many ways to participate in a college class. Just a few of the most valuable contributions are:

1 Raising ideas from our assigned materials for class discussion, including directing our attention to specific moments you found evocative, inspiring, infuriating, or otherwise salient;

2 Asking questions about materials or ideas you found puzzling or difficult;

I cannot overstate how valuable good questions are to a thriving class, and how desperately I wish more students were courageous in asking them!

3 Sharing pertinent materials discovered outside of class to Gradescope, or bringing them to our attention during discussion;

4 Assisting classmates with in-class work amenable to cooperation;

5 Having discussion on Campuswire to extend course conversations around subjects or questions you find particularly interesting.

Assignments

Additionally, you will be asked to complete several brief writing responses or exercises outside of class and write at least one longer paper. All written work will be submitted through Gradescope, which is also where you'll receive feedback.

Late work

In general, due to the course schedule and the format for assignments, late work can't be accepted. However, if you know you won't be able to submit an assignment or exam on time, talk to me.

If you're experiencing a major problem – medical, psychological, family, etc. – that is interfering with your ability to complete your class work, you should talk to your class advisor, the Dean of Studies, or Health Services, who will recommend appropriate accommodations to all of your professors, who genuinely want you to succeed.

Academic integrity

If you haven't already done so, you should read "Going to the Source", available from the Dean of the College website. Quoting from Chapter X, "In suspected cases of plagiarism, the instructor prepares a written statement of complaint to the Academic Panel." Please don't put yourself or your professor in that position. When in doubt, *stop* and ask me first.

Communication and getting help

I expect all students to participate in class discussions. In return, I will make myself available to answer questions, listen to concerns, and talk to any student about topics related to the class. I welcome your feedback throughout the semester about how the course is going.

Our course uses Campuswire for online discussions. You can use it to ask questions about course concepts, assignments, and logistics. It is also used for discussions among students, including for any work to be done in groups.

The quickest way to get feedback and help will be via Campuswire. We expect you to read Campuswire every day or two for announcements and clarifications to assignments; you are responsible for all clarifications made at least 48 hours before an assignment is due.

Posts on Campuswire can be either public or private. Public posts are visible to everyone, while private posts are visible only to course staff. Any questions having to do with your particular solution to an assignment should be private; all other posts should be public. (If you have a question about something, it's very likely that other students do, too!)

Because Campuswire is an extension of our classroom discussion, we expect everyone to behave accordingly: No disrespect, rudeness, or abuse will be tolerated.

Campuswire is a discussion forum, so please feel free to respond to questions and comments – it's great when students can learn from each other!

Instructor availability

Office hours will be listed on the instructor's website. All student meetings this semester will be conducted online.

I typically only check email and other messages between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. on weekdays. If you send a message that needs a response during those times, you can expect to get a response within six hours (often much sooner). Otherwise, you can expect one when I'm back online.

Pandemic policies

Before coming to class, perform a self-evaluation and, if you feel even the slightest bit of sickness, stay home and participate remotely. You should be physically present in class only if you feel as healthy as normal.

Please know that at any time this semester, if you feel unable or unwilling to be present for a face-to-face meeting, you can opt out and participate remotely – no questions asked, no permission needed, no penalty incurred. Remember that face-to-face meetings are live-streamed, and you can participate in the class remotely through Campuswire, so you will not fall behind if you have to participate in class from home.

Academic accommodations

Academic accommodations are available for students registered with the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity (AEO). Students in need of disability (ADA/504) accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been approved by the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity, as indicated in your AEO accommodation letter.

Diversity and inclusion

I would like to create a learning environment that supports diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences, and honors your identities.

- If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your official records, please let me know!

- If you feel that your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to contact me. If you prefer to speak with someone outside of the course, you can contact your class advisor or the Dean of Studies.

- I (like many people) am still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities. If something was said in class (by anyone) that made you feel uncomfortable, please talk to me about it.

Title IX

Vassar College is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students that is free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, relationship abuse, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these incidents, know that you are not alone. Vassar College has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware all Vassar faculty members are "responsible employees," which means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship abuse, or stalking, I must share that information with the Title IX Coordinator. Although I have to make that notification, the Title IX office will only provide outreach by email. You will control how your case will be handled – you don't have to read or respond to the email, and it is completely up to you whether to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone privately, you can contact any of the following on-campus resources:

- Counseling Service (counselingservice.vassar.edu, 845-437-5700)

- Health Service (healthservice.vassar.edu, 845-437-5800)

- Nicole Wong, SAVP (Sexual Assault and Violence Prevention) director (savp.vassar.edu, 845-437-7863)

- SART (Sexual Assault Response Team) advocate, available 24/7 by calling the CRC at 845-437-7333 and asking for SART

The SAVP website (savp.vassar.edu) and the Title IX section of the EOAA website (eoaa.vassar.edu/title-ix) have more information, as well as links to both on- and off-campus resources.

Acknowledgments

This course – and this syllabus – is based in large part on work by other professors. The discussion of class expectations is adapted from Ryan Cordell. The policy on asking and answering questions and on communication on Campuswire is adapted from Laney Strange. The statement on diversity and inclusion is adapted from Monica Linden.