“I See DH Everywhere Now!”
Teaching the Challenges and Possibilities of East Asian Digital Humanities

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How and Why?

• No such course offered in North America as of AY 2017-2018
• SAS Price Lab for Digital Humanities founded at Penn
  • DH Undergraduate Minor
  • Graduate Certificate in DH (starting AY 2018-2019)
  • First year of course offerings across many disciplines in DH
• Offered via EALC department at grad/undergrad level
  • SAS Dean and EALC Dept Chair worked together to offer
  • Enthusiasm all around!
Format and Content

• **Survey seminar**
  • Very different most other DH courses at grad or undergrad level
  • Participation 60% of grade (in-class discussion and response papers)
  • No hands-on lab or in-class technical skill development

• **13 different topics covered in one semester!**
  • Intro to DH, mapping, metadata, network analysis, corpus building, methods in text mining, APIs, crowdsourcing, putting projects online

• **Final projects 40% of grade**
  • Undergrad: literature review
  • Grad: major project proposal with pitch cover sheet
Why Project Pitches and Participation?

• Skill building: pitch and lightning talk
  • Be clear and concise as well as convincing
  • Understand realistic requirements of projects – what do you need, what do you still need to learn?

• Participation is key!
  • Learning from each other
  • Exploring DH together
  • Actively engage with and reflect on new concepts and research
(students hate lightning talks)
Seminar Pedagogy

• Major challenge: how do you introduce “DH” to students with no knowledge of the field or technical skill??

• Primary goal: inspire students to explore how DH is relevant to their work AND realize specific skills needed to implement projects

→ Survey format! ←

But why not teach them how to actually program or use tools...?
Course content

• Different topic every week (13 weeks)
  • Diverse cases to inspire everyone, no matter their research topic/method

• Class prep:
  • Readings – research papers, chapters, blog posts
  • Lecture videos from unpublished projects/scholars
  • Preview projects and websites

• Guest speakers:
  • Expert librarians, fellow students
  • Importance of collaboration and seeking help/new skills from others
“East Asian Studies” and “DH”

• East Asian Studies?
  • Geography and language...
  • Cold War/colonial mentality of area studies

• Digital Humanities?
  • United by using computational methods of some kind
  • Amorphous and contested

• “East Asian DH?”
  • Challenges of non-Western sources and contexts for computational methods
  • “Other” or anomaly to Western DH – and they don’t feel our pain!
What is “East Asian DH”? 

• “Other” or outlier in Western DH... and in computing generally
  *(if it even occurs to anyone!)*
• Computing generally assumes Western languages and contexts
• United by common challenges, and invisibility in DH field thus far
  • Availability of data and sources
  • Difficulty in using non-Western data (esp. text) with off-the-shelf tools
  • Finding collaborators is hard without reaching across borders
• East Asian DH is a very nascent field, especially in English
Challenges: Text data

• Text encodings
  • UTF-8 vs. Latin
  • Dealing with language-specific encodings (ex. Shift-JIS)

• Tokenization
  • Everything assumes whitespace between “words”
  • Can require specialized programming/command line knowledge

• (Un-)Availability of Corpora
  • OCR limitations (and almost no one cares)
  • Amount of text data depends on language, country, initiatives
Text data: it’s getting better...

• Voyant Tools
  • (Tries to) tokenize for Chinese and Japanese
  • Basic analysis (bag of words)

• AntConc
  • Any UTF-8, tokenized text
  • Basic corpus linguistics

• Topic Modeling Tool/MALLET
  • Any UTF-8, tokenized text
  • Topic modeling (Tool = friendly MALLET GUI)
Challenges: Collaboration and Awareness

• Very small “field” compared to Western DH
  • Hard to find others – we are not all in the same departments!
  • Many scholars are also still grad students

• Hard to find new scholarship
  • Range of area, disciplinary, and DH journals; personal websites; lecture videos on YouTube; books that don't "look DH-y”; etc.

• Less visibility, participation in mainstream Western DH community

• Could be better at international partnerships/exchange
  • Ex. North America <-> Japan

• Collaboration between professionals/practitioners and faculty/students?
Challenges: Collaboration and Awareness

• Let's not reinvent the wheel
• More collaboration needed in general!
  • Practitioner / scholar
  • International outreach
• Community-building and communication are key
  • And that's where "East Asian DH" comes in...
"I see DH everywhere now!"

- Birds-eye approach --> big-picture discussions
- Exposed students to many aspects of DH possibilities
- “Dream big!”

- Who?
  - 1 EALC/Poli Sci undergrad
  - 1 EALC MA (now doing first DH grad certificate!)
  - 2 EALC PhD, 6 History PhD
Undergraduate Final Project

• Literature Review
• Synthesize, don't just summarize

• EALC/Political Science double major
• Weibo sentiment analysis (text mining/analysis)
Graduate Final Project

• "Project Pitch" with one-page cover sheet
  • Argue for relevance and contribution of project
  • "Why should I give you money/time/etc to do this?"

• Be very clear about what is needed (money, time, skills to learn, staff)

• Context for project – both in East Asian studies and in DH

• What is it contributing? What research question is it answering?
  ("DH" isn't a methodology!)
Graduate Projects

• EALC Japanese PhD: Crowdsourced map of accessible spaces in Tokyo

• Japanese history PhDs: text analysis on interwar documents (food studies, kana use promotion)
Graduate Projects

• Chinese history PhDs: mapping Ming frontiers
  • Neither have many texts – what to map?
  • Need topographical data for maps!

• EALC Chinese PhD: e-resource for generating definitions of concepts

• EALC Chinese MA: digital museum of Central/East Asian instruments
Questions?

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