Digital Humanities Assignments for Undergraduates: A Case Study

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Neoliberal Tools (and Archives): A Political History of Digital Humanities

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How should we introduce digital humanities methods and tools to undergraduates?
Digital Humanities for Undergraduates

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Professor Emily Morash and students presenting at the Visualization Wall, May 2016
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- Using technology to further pedagogical goals
- Willingness to experiment and “fail”
- Thinking about scalability

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Develop a digital project that utilizes the journal, making it more accessible for undergraduate student research.
PROCESS

- Seminar (January-April)
- Library Research Instruction Session early on
- Collaborative Digital Project
  - Introduction to project and meeting with librarian for digitization instructions
  - Scanning of the *Journal of Housing* (4 issues per student, 2 volumes collectively)
  - Presentation of digital humanities methods and tools by librarian
  - Small-group work in the Advanced Technology Lab (3 weeks)
  - Presentations at the Visualization Wall
  - Individual Reflective Essays
REFLECTIVE ESSAY

- What did you learn during this project? (In terms of content, tools, teamwork, etc).
- What would happen with your project if you had more data (i.e. the entire journal)?
- Was it useful to learn how to use these tools?
- Could you see yourself using these tools for future projects?
- What was most challenging about this project?
- Was using the Visualization Wall and effective way to present your project? What were the advantages? Disadvantages?
GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Group One:
“Comparing the Results of Optical Character Recognition Software”

Group Two:
“Image Analysis”

Group Three:
“Mapping Advertisements in the Journal of Housing”
Excerpts from Student Presentations
About the Journal of Housing

Exists in print only
Printed using an old ink press
Characters are not crisp
Alignment is not perfect
Characters are not uniform

Journal physically-bound during scanning
Shading picked up by scanner
Some stylistic typography (logos, etc.) hard to read by software
Overall, Acrobat found more instances of most words than ABBYY (with the training we gave it)
Software Comparison

Acrobat
- Relatively Fast
- Very accessible
- Not particularly accurate

ABBYY
- Much slower (hours instead of minutes)
- Significantly more accurate after training
- Character-by-character prompts for learning
Looking Ahead

Recommendations

Scanning procedure
- Single page, cut and flat, instead of double and bound
- Erase / clean journal pages to remove pencil notes, etc.
- Increase scan resolution
- More time training ABBYY

Software suggestion (for comparison to ABBYY)
- Nuance OmniPage
  - $150 - $500
Inspiration:

Averaging Covers in *Vogue*
Question:

Do the images of people in the *Journal of Housing* reveal patterns that speak to larger social issues?
Groups photos
Visualizing Results

Journal of Housing: Race

Journal of Housing: Gender Differences

Number of People Represented in Photographs

Journal of Housing Issue: Month and Year
Journal of Housing: Photo Representation of People

Number of times each type of group appeared in an issue

Journal of Housing Issue: Month and Year

Individual Person
Small Group
Large Group
Research Question

Which city, in the United States, offers more services, based on the number of times their directory was advertised in the Journal of Housing?
Data Variables

When considering what information to collect in order to investigate our RQ, we mostly looked into these variables:

- JOH
- Name of the company
- Profession
- Services
- Location
- Coordinates

The 1966 data set consisted of **891 rows**.
The 1967 data set consisted of **815 rows**.
Findings cont.

Heatmap of 1966 Data

Heatmap of 1967 Data
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Takeaways

Students:

- Digitized content doesn’t exist by magic!
- Digitization requires tremendous effort to yield useful products
- Teamwork is essential
- Data entry is tedious and must be meticulous
- Learned Excel in the process

Professor and Librarian:

- Students are very excited to do DH work, when framed within their own disciplinary and career interests
- Start small, with potential for scaling up or having future students build upon the work of students in past semesters
  - Students responded well to this idea and felt more invested in their work
- Focus on the foundational skillsets, applicable to many tools and methods