

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS about Digital Humanities and the Digital Humanities Initiative at Xavier University

What ARE the Digital Humanities?

Digital Humanities is a field of study, a form of research, and a style of teaching that involves the intersection of computing and electronic presentation of materials with the vast fields of studies surrounding the human experience. While generally focused on humanities-based disciplines, this name can be limiting. Focused on the creation of public knowledge for the public good but also for greater learning experiences, ownership of knowledge production, and the advancement of research through electronic resources, digital humanities is, according to scholar Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, “more akin to a common methodological outlook than an investment in any one specific set of texts or even technologies.” [<https://mkirschenbaum.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/ade-final.pdf>]

Do I have to be a technology wizard to start a digital humanities project?

No! While in some ways digital humanities can be a **constantly shifting target** [<http://whatisdigitalhumanities.com/>), that advance with changes in technology that does not mean you have to be aware of the most cutting edge computing advances. Despite the need for at least some digital awareness, there are many ways to be involved with digital humanities that do not involve being a computer or Internet wizard. Advances in technology provide interfaces that allow students and faculty with limited experience to develop and even post created knowledge to public sights that range from basic Wordpress sites to complex archival databases. Moreover, learning through the process of faculty-student collaboration can often lead to individual and group advancement in computing knowledge. There is virtually no limit to the information and research that can be presented through the methodology of digital humanities, save for the interest of students, faculty, and the community!

Why should I develop a Digital Humanities project? How can Digital Humanities projects enhance the learning experiences of my students at Xavier?

Digital Humanities projects advance the student learning experience in a number of key ways. First, they empower students as knowledge producers rather than simply knowledge consumers. When students participate in such initiatives – from researching and writing Wikipedia entries to contributing to research databases – they are offering their voice as part of public scholarship. Research has found that while creating buy-in can be challenging, students find the final products extremely fulfilling. Moreover, participation in digital humanities projects creates opportunities for students to build electronic portfolios and demonstrate hands-on experience for internships and job applications. Many digital humanities projects also engage group work and convey to students both the challenges and rewards of collaborative learning. Finally, digital humanities projects extend learning into the community and demonstrate the value of thinking beyond the classroom. In “learning by doing” students can be challenged and empowered to become collaborators and creators of scholarship across a wide variety of disciplines.

How could a Digital Humanities project benefit me as a teacher-scholar?

Just as digital humanities projects help students move beyond the role of “consumer,” they also empower faculty to take on new roles in the classroom that include facilitator, peer researcher, and learner. As initiatives develop, professors can take on new roles as team member and collaborator, learning alongside students as challenges and obstacles are faced. Digital humanities projects can also help faculty members advance research agendas, create public-facing scholarship, and extend their pedagogical tool kits.

What is the Digital Humanities Initiative at Xavier?

The *Digital Humanities Initiative* is one component of the Faculty Development for Integrative Pedagogy and Assessment Practices Grant from the Mellon Foundation. According to the grant proposal, its intent is “to achieve the goal of incorporating projects in core courses that require students to use electronic methodologies to demonstrate what they know in applied and collaborative contexts.” It is a three-year project that seeks to engage faculty in developing digital humanities as part of their core curriculum teaching, as well as build a core group of DH engaged faculty and projects. The project provides support for “planning, implementing, and assessing a digitally-based project into a core curriculum course” and it includes semester luncheons and workshops, an annual summer seminar, and funds for faculty development travel for intensive training in summers.

I’m not a humanities scholar. Can I still engage with the Digital Humanities Initiative @ Xavier?

Yes! Digital Humanities projects encompass all aspects of the human experience. While the name is understandably limiting, many have argued that DH, as more a methodology, is applicable to a wide swath of disciplinary approaches so long as it engages electronic technologies and provokes inquiries into local, national, or universal human realities. According to Martha Margarita Nafpaktitis, digital humanities is “interdisciplinary, collaborative, design-aware, iteration-positive, oriented toward accessibility (in many senses)” and “applies digital technologies alongside more conventional ones to cultural and social questions & has the potential to enable new questions through the use of those technologies.” In short, the Digital Humanities Initiative is intended for *any* faculty member that seeks to engage DH in the development or redevelopment of a core course.

I know that the Digital Humanities is part of the Core Curriculum Enhancement Grant. I would love to write a proposal for the workshop and/or summer seminar, but I don’t know what course to use as part of my proposal. Help!?

Your course can be a current core course or a potential future core course. The former is easy enough to identify while the latter a bit more nebulous. However, if you can envision a course that could possibly fit into a version of the new core or is in line with our new learning objectives (based on the current documentation from the Core Curriculum Working Group), you are more than welcome to propose it for a workshop or summer seminar.

What kinds of projects are possible under the Digital Humanities umbrella?

There are *so* many projects that fit under the Digital Humanities umbrella including blogs, databases, documentaries, podcasts, interactive maps, and storytelling projects. The only limit is really your imagination and, of course, the current advancements in digital technology!

Where can I go for more resources?

Please see the Digital Humanities Initiative section of the Core Curriculum Enhancement page: <http://www.xula.edu/cas/digitalhumanities.html>.