

Chapter 8

Designing Engaging Assessments for Teaching the Digital Humanities

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ABSTRACT

Humanities are pertinent to the digital culture of today. This chapter details how non-Humanities students are engaged in “Digital Humanities: From Text to txt,” a team taught, multidisciplinary course offered at the University of Auckland since 2016. Engagement across five Humanities disciplines—Art History, English Literature, History, Philosophy, and Religious Studies—is unified with the common theme of the “digital turn.” The course is modular with each discipline given a two-week block in a twelve-week semester. Students learn with and about technologies through a range of digital forms of engagement encountered in the Humanities. The course builds on students’ digital curiosity to revisit questions of personal identity, ethics and belief, meaning, creativity, and historical understanding. Engagement begins in the lecture and tutorial and is deepened via five short assessments and an online final examination. Over the two iterations of the course, student satisfaction and pass rate was high and enrolments increased by 20%.

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INTRODUCTION

Humanities and the “Digital Turn”

The broad array of disciplines identified as the Humanities have engaged questions of artistic and literary creativity, forms of critical judgment and rationality, religious and philosophical traditions, and enduring questions of historical interpretation and identity. The originating questions and practices of the Humanities thus date back several centuries; yet the Humanities are also essential to the mobile, digital, data- and media-intensive culture of today. Scholars within humanistic traditions have embraced new technologies for both research and teaching and have engaged in a wide-ranging debate over how (or even whether) the humanities should go digital (Berry, 2012; Burdick et. al., 2013; Schreibman et. al, 2016). This chapter details an effort to engage students using technologies in the design and facilitation of “Digital Humanities: From Text to txt,” a team taught, multidisciplinary course offered at the University of Auckland since 2016. The main goal of the Digital Humanities course is to *engage* non-Humanities students in the questions, ways of thinking, and objects of study in the Humanities. Engagement is across five *disciplines* - Art History, English Literature, History, Philosophy, and Religious Studies. The course is unified with the common course theme of the “digital turn.” Each participating discipline decides how best to illuminate the impact and implications of the new digital methods, approaches, and tools which are then used to engage students in the respective disciplines.

The goal to explicate the political and cultural significance of the Humanities to today’s students is clearly outlined in the course syllabus, “[T]his course offers a ‘tasting menu’ of what the Humanities look like as they engage with digital instruments and new technologies... [it] is designed to appeal to your curiosity about what it means to be human in the digital age. We hope you will come away from this ... with a sense of the communicative and collaborative possibilities of our digital world, and an appreciation for how and why humanistic ways of thinking and doing can enrich our everyday lives and experiences.”

In the Digital Humanities course, students learn *with* and *about* technologies through a range of digital forms of engagement encountered in the Humanities. The course builds on students’ digital curiosity to revisit questions of personal identity, ethics and belief, meaning, creativity, and historical understanding. The structure is modular with each discipline given a two-week block in a twelve-week semester. Engagement begins and is facilitated - through a range of technologies - in the lecture and tutorial and is deepened via five short assessments and an online final examination. The tutorials are crucial to building the connective themes and practices of the course, equip students with additional resources to take beyond the course, and immerse students as disciplinary practitioners (producers as well as consumers of knowledge).

Over the two iterations of the course, student enrolment increased by 20%, as the awareness of this unique course spread across the University. The course also had a high satisfaction and pass rate which can be attributed to well-designed strategies for engaging students in authentic, technology-integrated learning in the disciplines. The course pass rate increased to 90% in its second iteration which is excellent for a General Education course at The University of Auckland. This chapter includes only a selection of instructional technologies core to the engagement and teaching strategies in the Digital Humanities course. To include all the technologies that were students’ choice and accommodated in the activities is beyond the scope of this chapter.

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