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L-100: Digital Approaches to Bibliography & Book History
14–19 June 2015

Narrative Course Evaluations

- 1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Did you do any additional preparation for your course? Are there any books or articles that you would like to see included in future years? Any that you might suggest removing?*
1. It would have been helpful to know ahead of time all the programs and materials we would need to download.
 2. The pre-course assignments were useful, yes. Since this isn't my field, I don't have any suggestions that come to mind.
 3. Due to work constraints, I only had time to read what was absolutely required. I found some of the readings challenging, but only because I have little knowledge of the bibliographical world. The readings became more relevant as the class progressed.
 4. The advance reading was useful—having specially recommended reading was a very good idea, because the overall list was very comprehensive and not manageable due to work commitments. But it will be useful to return to in the future.
 5. A good overview of some of the key concepts. Very much appreciated that everything required could be gotten digitally.
 6. The pre-course readings were useful, and I really appreciate having the longer list so that we can go back to it and read more.
 7. Readings that addressed the technology, software, and recent work in bibliography were useful. Older readings on the nature of bibliography (Tanselle, Greg) were not.
 8. I would have liked a quick command-line tutorial on the reading list. Most of the class's difficulties came in loading programs. I would suggest loading as much ahead of time as possible—even requesting help from your institution, if you have one, when things inevitably glitch.
 9. I really enjoyed much of the pre-course reading, and was sorry that we spent almost no time on it in class. The FBRB and BIBFRAME RDG seemed unnecessary; we never even referred to them as resources. The pre-class downloads were far too much, especially when we used the new software so little (maybe five minutes for Franken). A better sense of the class's goals and intended outcomes (beyond exposure) would have helped to eliminate unnecessary downloads. Also, students need to be made aware of how long downloads take (or might take). The instructions for the downloads were excellent, but spending that time organizing datasets for the class or coming up with more structured activities might make for a better use of everyone's time.
 10. Readings were helpful, though I may have needed a couple more “technical” pre-class readings—i.e., a primer on common acronyms, examples of codes/commands.
 11. The reading for L-100 was excellent. I learned/refreshed many things from library school, and other grad school work in textual bibliography and descriptive

bibliography. The technical information was a bit beyond me, but I expected that. Fabulous instructions, however—but there were “local variations.”

12. Yes. For those of us who don't code on a regular basis, a quick UNIX tutorial reviewing basic commands (ls, pwd, cd, &c.) might have been a helpful addition to the advance course readings/preparations list. The projects and toolkit lists might usefully be broken up into subheadings.

2) *What are your thoughts on the course workbook and/or other teaching materials distributed during class? Was the content appropriate and useful? Will it continue to be useful for you after the course?*

1. Very useful, although I think we could have spent more time with some content and less time with other—all was good to know about.
2. I think the equivalent to a workbook would be all the software we downloaded. Only some will be useful, but only because of my particular research and teaching interests.
3. The digital tools suggested will be very helpful. The software provided that requires coding will be helpful only if I invest the time to get better at coding!
4. Some of the digital packages were unstable or not working—but this is an inevitability for such a course.
5. All that was distributed was software and links. Some I'll delete. Some I'll keep. A guide to all the programs and tools would be a good addition, as I will forget what some do.
6. Most of these materials were downloaded software. It was overwhelming and time consuming to do this, but a valuable part of the learning experience.
7. There were no workbooks. The open-source, virtual-environment software was fascinating, but time constraints prevent it from being useful.
8. All of the programs and coding we received will undoubtedly be useful and necessary. The promised “exit list” of resources on CGS's website will be an excellent resource, along with the preliminary reading list.
9. It took up so much space on my computer! I need to inventory it, as I've lost track of all that is on there now. I imagine that some of it will be useful, but I will likely use the web-based tools most. I do think (and hope) that I will work more in the command line now, but not on a virtual box.
10. I downloaded a lot, but with some things, I'm not entirely clear if I'll recall how to use them. Perhaps some (very brief) descriptions of each resource and how they work together and for what end would be useful, either as a pre-class document or at the onset of each session.
11. This is a very good bibliography. Even more links to the sites of the tools used could have been sent ahead. I will re-read all of it, and use it to prepare to be cross-trained at work, though I wish it had come after a year of the cross-training.
12. Because it is difficult to follow complex instructions and execute them in a second window on a single screen if you are not used to flipping back and forth between windows, an external monitor, or printed handouts of specific sets of instructions, might be helpful during the class.

3) *If you've taken previous RBS courses, how did this one compare?*

1. {no response}

2. It's hard to compare a course in its first year with "Desbib," which has been around for years. This one wasn't as well organized, mainly because attention to the software issues took us off track.
 3. N/A
 4. This was different, and not only because of a greater emphasis on the digital. It was less structured than others I have taken, and the provisional schedule varied quite a bit depending on our progress and the work we were doing.
 5. This was less polished (unsurprising for a new course). The work-in-progress feel did suit the material, however.
 6. N/A
 7. This course was an exuberant but messy romp through a territory that is itself unfinished, in progress. My last experience, "Analytical Bibliography," was much more structural, and I walked away with more immediately useful and concrete skills/knowledge.
 8. This course was less organized (since it was the first time), but just as engaging. I am not walking away with as many workable skills as I did from TB's course {"Book Illustration Processes to 1900"}, but I feel that I learned just as much and have a direction to go forward.
 9. RBS has changed so much! In my first course, about eight years ago, I was one of the only academics. Now there are fewer librarians. This made the class dynamic different, in that people's reasons for being in the class were far more varied.
 10. More difficult, primarily because of my own learning curve.
 11. N/A
 12. This was the most experimental and unpredictable of all RBS courses I have taken. It was probably the most frustrating and confusing of all the courses, as well. But it was certainly "hands on," in keeping with the RBS ethos, and has given rise to a great sense of camaraderie among class members that is wonderful, too.
- 4) *Which aspects of the course were most interesting and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*
1. Lots of new ideas, insights, and plans.
 2. I foresee certain tools like Intero, Open Refine, and Juxta being potentially useful, especially for my teaching. It definitely gave me some new teaching ideas, but less so in the research, since the technology is still far from my grasp.
 3. The discussions around ontologies and linked open data were most helpful. I also found the discussions regarding the imaging and image quality necessary for digital scholarship very informative.
 4. I left with lots of new ideas and things to think about. I learned to dip my toes in the waters of methods I would have shied away from previously. This was very positive for me. Learning about digital approaches at scale was the most interesting part of course.
 5. Several of the tools (particularly OCR and some of the image things) will be good to have at my disposal in the future.
 6. I leave with many new project plans, both for my own research and for my teaching.
 7. 1) The image-recognition software and its potential applications; 2) material on linked data and its relevance/future.
 8. Learning how to extract data from the ESTC with Zotero and then manipulate it

- in Open Refine has me really excited for possible projects looking at networks of publishers, printers, and authors. The image-recognition software is also exciting, but beyond my technical skills.
9. The L.O.D. and ontology work was most useful to me. I wish there had been more of this, much more, and less on topic modeling and spectral imaging.
 10. Survey of possible tools was excellent, and the discussions of applications and possible uses was good—indeed, more of this would be great. Setting up names of resources and what you might do with them at the beginning of each session would help.
 11. The most interesting to me were on linked data, ontology and the semantic web, and approaches to complex problems in data analysis and extraction. I come away with a much clearer idea of how far behind I am, and what training to pursue.
 12. I enjoyed seeing the different classes/groups of tools that now exist, and hearing our instructors' opinions of their uses, strengths/weaknesses, and likelihood of persistence. It was also helpful to hear some of the technical vocabulary used to define these tools, so that I have the search terms I can use to find more online.
- 5) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Was anything left out or undeveloped? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*
1. If anything, I would say some aspects were underdeveloped. Restructuring some of the assignments to allow more time for hands-on work would be good—also more structured exercises (and some more flexibility).
 2. I would have preferred more conceptual and methodological discussion over tinkering with (and battling against) the software for as long as we did. I learned a lot about the state of the field and the challenges, but a lot of the technical content went over my head, because of my low skill level in that area.
 3. 1) Time was lost due to the uneven knowledge of coding among students; 2) time was lost because not all students were able to install programs; 3) some digital tools accessed outside of the class didn't work...and that's kind of what digital scholarship is like!
 4. Some of the particular areas I was interested in could not be covered practically due to software problems—which was a little disappointing. But I did learn a lot about possible directions for research, and some valuable technical skills.
 5. Many of the concepts and tools felt underdeveloped. Like we just scratched the surface. Also not surprising, as any element could be its own course.
 6. The instructors were extremely patient and poised. I learned a lot, including learning how little I know about digital tools.
 7. The instructors were extremely helpful, but their task was Herculean, maybe even Sisyphian. (BP doesn't sleep!) There were too many potential bugs in the software, and way too much material for them to cover.
 8. Yes, I learned what is available for leveraging technology in service of book history and bibliography, and I am walking away knowing how I can become more proficient with these tools.
 9. More discussion of the reading would've been great, but most of all, I would've loved to have spent more time on metadata. The group activities on Friday worked well, as did the "speed dating" activities on day two. In between, I was often confused about what we were doing and why we were doing it.

10. Perhaps spend more time on some of the more basic tools, ones that could be implemented in the classroom. {private response} Also, I'd love more sheets that have basic instructions for some platforms, i.e., Palladio, Google Refine, &c.
11. I was not able to acquire skills because I had too little basic tech training—no HTML that I could remember, and I am not a cataloger, but I do know and use MARC. I do not think the course as structured can import completely new skills (unlike, say, learning descriptive bibliography).
12. The course wasn't really about skill acquisition, but it was, as promised, an introduction to a wide range of tools and methods. I wish we had had more time for discussion of broader questions that we only touched on (e.g., How do these new tools change our ideas of what bibliography should address? How do they change our standards of proof?), and a little less time spent discovering that our tools had failed us....

6) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*

1. {no response}
2. To apply to my teaching of rare books, and to ponder potential future projects. Perhaps I will be able to use the preliminary things I learned about cataloging to create a catalog in the near future.
3. 1) Informing the decision-making process regarding the creation of an OPAC based on linked open data. 2) It has inspired me to learn more code!
4. I hope to develop some practical projects in this area soon—digital skills deteriorate quickly without use!
5. No specific plans. More of a nebulous desire to mess around with the tools and see what happens or what it inspires me to start a project on.
6. I will use this knowledge in my courses, and to help shape a digital humanities program at my institution. I am in a much better position to contribute to that conversation now.
7. Not exactly sure yet. A lot of that will depend on whether I have the stamina, money, and will to struggle with the buggy software and learn the languages necessary to tell it what to do.
8. I am planning on experimenting with some small personal projects, looking into architectural publishing.
9. Not sure yet.
10. I plan to stay in touch with the instructors and others in the course—people are the best resource.
11. I plan to craft a remedial program to learn: 1) coding, 2) HTML, 3) advanced Excel, and will decide if Unix or Windows commands are what I should learn. I think the former. Then I will work with a digital initiative librarian to further two projects.
12. Eventually, I hope to use a subset of the tools presented in the class to analyze my own sets of bibliographical data.

7) Please briefly describe the intellectual level of the course. What sort of person might benefit the most from taking it?

1. Someone with patience for technology that doesn't always work to plan—one who

- is open to experimentation in humanistic/book history methods.
2. I think someone with greater knowledge of coding and digital/technical skills would benefit the most, unless it is restructured to spend more time discussing big-picture concepts and methodologies.
 3. People who are curious, willing to fail, willing to share, willing to learn, and who probably have at least an intermediate knowledge of coding will enjoy and benefit from this class.
 4. People with little experience of digital methods may struggle with the practical parts—that level is quite high. But it is conceptually interesting for a broad range of people.
 5. People with specific digital projects in mind. Command-line work or knowledge of programming languages not essential, but helpful.
 6. I was at the bottom of the range of expertise in digital knowledge coming into this course. I hope the course remains open to students at this level, because it served as a terrific introduction for me. I also really appreciated the mixture of librarians and academics.
 7. It's not so much a question of intellect, as one of stamina and focus—ask yourself how detail-oriented you are. How willing are you to push through with a technical problem to its end, via repeated trial and error.
 8. This course requires a fairly strong foundation in bibliography because you need to know books as physical objects before you can analyze them digitally (know your Gaskell; Bowers is less crucial). Some knowledge in programming, cataloging, and TEI will also carry you a long way, but you don't need to be an expert.
 9. The more advanced one is, technologically, the better one will do. I would say that I was about mid-level in the class in terms of tech skills, and a great number of things went over my head or went way too fast.
 10. It may be pitched more for a person with a good grounding in digital tools already, but even without that, I took quite a bit away from the experience.
 11. I would suggest RBS get behind a movement to advance the digital humanities by making this a two-level course. Level 1: after a summary, students take a free online course that the instructors would recommend, via Coursera or lynda.com. It may have to be tailored to the beginner. Part II is advanced for coders.
 12. The kind of person who would most benefit from this course is one who is impatient with manual/traditional/repetitive analysis, and who is willing to tinker.
- 8) *If applicable, what were the most original, powerful, or otherwise noteworthy educational moments in the course? Were there any "aha!" moments you'd like to share?*
1. Working through our research problem on the final day was the biggest "aha" moment—seeing how one needs to rethink the problem and re-approach the data or method as you hit a wall was great. Also the teamwork.
 2. {no response}
 3. {no response}
 4. Figuring out the practicability of things that had previously seemed really abstract to me.
 5. The consistent tone of trying new things and seeing what happens, as well as

- learning from failure, was always encouraging.
6. A lot of my “aha” moments happened after class, while walking or exercising, when I began to realize how I could use what I learned in class at my institution and in my classrooms.
 7. I wish there had been more “aha” moments. The material and the pace were overwhelming.
 8. BP gave us a zip folder with a Zotero extension to format ESTC data. {private response}
 9. I know they will come!
 10. Our group work on Friday was incredibly illuminating—it might be good to do more of this “project-based” work in the course.
 11. Oh, CGS and BP had many great insights about the nature of evidence, the challenge of data, the nature of ground truth—this was new to me.
 12. The final day, working on a problem together with a small group, was highly enjoyable. I wish we’d had more time.

9) *How could the course have been improved?*

1. 1) Vary time spent on exercises/tools; 2) more preparation of assignment/materials ahead of time (so we’re not downloading in class).
2. See Q5, above. Less getting off track or grappling with coding details. Perhaps more back-and-forth conceptual thinking between the material object and the digital, like we did on the first and last days.
3. 1) Provide a list of all tools and programs that will be used prior to class; 2) provide clean datasets for students to use; 3) provide packets of code that will be used or modified prior to class; 4) use fewer tools, and talk more about how and why those tools are used.
4. With a tighter structure and more realistic practical goals. Technical problems and installation time—while pedagogically useful and understandable—were frustrating.
5. Could have cut down on the number of programs. Felt like a lot of time was spent downloading and troubleshooting.
6. Perhaps a few basic guides to working with your computer (esp. VirtualBox) before showing up?
7. Less is more. Cover half the material, maybe even a third. Scrap the individual computers and virtual environments, and use UVA computers in a computer lab.
8. A “packet” approach to learning the programs, so that everyone is working on the same thing at the same time—paired with a “cooking show” approach to cut down on time, will improve the course immensely. A knowledgeable teaching assistant of sorts—someone who could workshop on that day’s programs after the course—would be superb. Also, visualization programs like Gephi.
9. A less-is-more approach needs to be adopted. I’m all for exposure to new ways of doing things, but much more prep for datasets needs to be done if that is the goal of the course. At times, we were told we could use our own data, but then we were left unsupported if those data didn’t do exactly what the instructors’ data did. I found this rather frustrating.
10. Less is more? Tuesday was overwhelming, so probably good to scale back the number of things we look at, and work more intensely with a few of them toward a specified end with a clearly defined set of materials.

11. As suggested above (see Q8), and of course it should be made clearer when to start installing the virtual machine, &c., and this will perhaps also be part of a full day. The bifurcation by skill level, and having Mac and Windows people sit together, would help.
 12. Since new tools frequently fail, servers go down, &c., it would be good if more contingency plans could be put into place so that we could continue pursuing a given thread of work to see what the potential outcomes would look like, given more time/resources/luck. (The pre-configured Ubuntu installer was helpful, for example.)
- 10) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? Would you recommend the course to others?*
1. Yes.
 2. Yes. I might recommend someone wait a year or two until the kinks are worked out (and I hope they continue the course because I'm sure they will be!).
 3. Yes, indeed!
 4. Yes—but less so than in previous years. And this is partly due to the course finding its feet in its first year. But I would recommend it, nonetheless.
 5. Yes. BP and CGS are two important voices in the digital community who are always moving forward. Worth it for their insights alone.
 6. Yes! Yes!
 7. I'd recommend the course on the third or fourth iteration.
 8. The course needs to develop its flow, but honestly, these tools are not easy, and they break. Smooth sailing is not possible, and the frustration is a learning process.
 9. Our instructors worked really hard, so in that sense, yes. I came here with a very specific project in mind, however, and in many ways, I haven't advanced in understanding how I'll complete it.
 10. With some tweaking, I'd certainly recommend it, especially to someone with more digital humanities experience than myself.
 11. Yes, even as the most useless and inexperienced one in the class, I got a great deal out of it. But it does require courage and "no ego" to do it if you are as incompetent as I was. If there can be a re-boot of careers for older librarians, that would be the best. More on Zotero would be good. Add Gephi.
 12. Yes. I would recommend the course to certain others—but not to the technophobic.
- 11) *If your course made any trips outside of the classroom, do you feel that they were time well spent?*
1. Yes, three trips, and all were relevant and interesting.
 2. Yes, to SC to see twelve copies of one book. I did not stay for the entire digital unit of the library presentation, so I can't comment on that.
 3. I am in deep envy of the digitization facilities!
 4. The trip to the image lab could have been briefer, but other trips were useful.
 5. I'd seen the collation machinery before, but it was probably good for people to see it. The SC digital project was nice, albeit jealousy inducing.
 6. The balance between laptop/digital work and hands-on work with physical

materials was crucial in this course, and the balance was perfect. The visit to the digital lab was really interesting.

7. The digital facilities at UVA were fascinating to me, but I'm not sure that learning about them enhanced my experience in the course.
 8. The digitization lab was informative and revealing—like a trip to an eighteenth-century printing office would be for “Desbib.”
 9. I enjoyed the trips to SC, but knowing that the Hinman was not working made that sort of a waste of time.
 10. Yes—the trip to the digital lab in SC was interesting. {private response}
 11. Yes—SC was wonderful, especially the digitization lab.
 12. The trips to the digitization lab and to use the collation equipment were helpful, but it would have been nice if those of us who were waiting to use the collator had had something to do—perhaps a first pass at the Sophonisba multiples?
- 12) *If you attended any of our optional evening events, do you feel that they were a good use of your time? Were there any that were particularly important to your RBS experience? Any that you could have done without?*
1. {no response}
 2. The socializing at all the events made them a good use of time.
 3. N/A
 4. {no response}
 5. {no response}
 6. The lecture on Chinese paper was interesting. It's nice that these evening events are available.
 7. {no response}
 8. I much preferred the lecture on Wednesday to the one on Monday in terms of content (modern private press) and the presentation (private-press books). The receptions were fun afterward.
 9. The talks this week were not substantive enough for me—too much “show and tell” to them. I would have enjoyed talks with more rigor.
 10. Lectures were not intellectually stimulating.
 11. The lectures were very interesting—loved the printer, in particular, Russell Maret. The booksellers were hard to find, and I'd have all people form groups at a gathering, maybe a smaller reception, before the booksellers.
 12. Both the Tomasko and the Maret lectures were worthwhile.
- 13) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*
1. Do your best to prepare and set up your laptop before arriving.
 2. Expect a great overview and excellent, expert teachers.
 3. Be sure that your computer is not more than two years old.
 4. Come with an open mind, and don't necessarily expect to leave with a ready-made solution to a question or problem that you have. The instructors are terrific—wonderfully knowledgeable and intellectually generous and hardworking and good fun. The course was not entirely as I expected it would be, but I did enjoy it.
 5. Bring a Mac. It's easier to troubleshoot, it seems. I had multiple tools fail completely on me, and difference in platform was a factor.

6. Just be prepared to do a lot of downloading; sometimes it took longer to download the software than we had time to use it.
7. Familiarize yourself with protocols in Unix/Linux commands.
8. If you can wait a year or two, the technology will improve, and CGS and BP will work out the bugs in the course itself. However, if you are an academic working with metadata, or a librarian with an inclination toward a digital project, the course will serve you well, showing you what can be done and what you could learn to do.
9. I would only recommend it to those with considerable tech capabilities—some programming skills and/or comfort with the command line.
10. Brush up on your familiarity with basic commands and do the reading. Spend some time thinking about what questions you want to answer.
11. I think if it remains the same, don't take it if you don't a) have a current project, b) know some coding and HTML, c) aren't a cataloger. But please do a remedial course for users of metadata and for late-career people. (Conjunctive phrases, not disjunctive).
12. {no response}

14) *If you had to sum up your RBS experience with a single sentence, phrase, or haiku, what would you say?*

1. Motivating, enabling, exhausting, confusing, enlightening.
2. Tiring, stimulating, productive.
3. Sudo, get some sleep! I'm talking to you, BP! Code, it/breaks my heart./Headache.
4. Thought-provoking!
5. It's nice to know that none of us really know what we're doing, but we're willing to try things out anyway.
6. Enlightening!
7. Less is more, and it can be just as fun!
8. Breaking is part of making.
9. This was my first RBS experience with the Mellon Fellows program; I found the social dynamic quite different now, as some folks know each other and others don't. I am nostalgic for the collective awkwardness of the first few days, when (almost) no one came in knowing others.
10. Intense.
11. Humbled, and at times in despair, I vow to close my thirty-year gap in technology skills for the good of humanism and its scholarship. Or die.
12. {private response}

Student Data

Number of respondents: 12 (of 12)

How did you arrange for time off to attend this course?

My institution/employer gave me professional leave time: 7 (58.33%)

My institution/employer did not give me professional leave; I used paid or vacation days: 1 (8.33%)

I am self-employed, and can arrange my own schedule: 1 (8.33%)
I am a student or non-year-round employee, with a more flexible summer schedule: 3 (25%)

Who paid your RBS tuition costs?

I paid 100% myself: 1 (8.33%)
My institution/employer paid 100%: 8 (66.67%)
I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive 100%: 2 (16.67%)
I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive part; my institution/employer paid the rest: 1 (8.33%)

Who paid your RBS housing expenses?

I paid 100% myself: 1 (8.33%)
My institution/employer paid 100%: 7 (58.33%)
I used a scholarship/fellowship to cover 100%: 2 (16.67%)
I stayed with friends/family, or stayed in my own home and commuted: 2 (16.67%)

Who paid your RBS travel expenses?

I paid 100% myself: 2 (16.67%)
My institution/employer paid 100%: 5 (41.67%)
My institution/employer paid part; I paid the rest: 1 (8.33%)
I used a scholarship/fellowship to cover 100%: 2 (16.67%)
I live locally, and had no travel expenses: 2 (16.67%)

Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

Library disciplines:

Curator: 1 (8.33%)
Library administrator: 1 (8.33%)
Special collections librarian: 2 (16.67%)
Subject specialist/bibliographer: 1 (8.33%)
Other: 1 (8.33%)

Student working toward a/n:

Ph.D./D.Phil: 1 (8.33%)

Professional educator:

Lecturer/adjunct: 1 (8.33%)
Assistant professor: 1 (8.33%)
Full professor: 1 (8.33%)

Other occupations/vocations:

Independent scholar: 1 (8.33%)
Other: 1 (8.33%)