

# ENGL 8/478: Electronic Texts

Dr. Stephen Ramsay  
207 Andrews Hall  
MWF 11:30–12:20

## 1 Description

This course is a broad introduction to the use of computers in humanistic study. We will survey the field of humanities computing from computational analysis of style to meditations on the cultural impact of computing in scholarly research and publishing. We will also study several specific technologies in detail—web technologies, the UNIX operating system, and relational database design—with an eye toward becoming proficient creators of digital scholarship.

## 2 Prerequisites

This course does not presume any prior knowledge of UNIX, web design, or relational databases. The course does presume, however, that you are a proficient computer user with substantial experience in at least one operating system. If you are unsure about this, please come talk to me.

## 3 Readings

### 3.1 Required

Spiller, Neil. *Cyber Reader: Critical Writings for the Digital Era*. New York: Phaidon, 2002. ISBN: 0714840718.

Peek, Jerry D., et al. *Learning the UNIX Operating System*. 5th. ed. Sebastopol: O'Reilly, 2002. ISBN: 0596002610

### 3.2 Recommended

Bowman, Judith S., Sandra L. Emerson, and Marcy Darnovsky. *The Practical SQL Handbook: Using SQL Variants*. 4th. ed. Boston: Pearson-Addison, 2001. ISBN: 0201703092.

Harold, Elliotte Rusty and W. Scott Means. *XML in a Nutshell*. 3rd. ed. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly, 2002. ISBN: 0596002920.

Musciano, Chuck and Bill Kennedy. *HTML & XHTML: The Definitive Guide*. 6th ed. Sebastopol: O'Reilly, 2002. ISBN: 0596527322.

## 4 Assignments

The primary work for this course consists of a series of graded problem sets designed to reinforce the material and to encourage exploration of the technologies we're studying this semester. The final grade is computed by dividing 100 by the total number of points accumulated (point values vary with each assignment) and then multiplying the resulting number by the point total. The professor reserves the right to curve final grades and to adjust individual grades up or down based on class participation, the progress of the student's work, and other standard metrics.

## 5 Schedule

Our schedule will alternate between formal instruction and theoretical meditation. We will study several core technologies in detail, but as we move through the technical materials, we'll also be reading some of the more important scholarly works in digital humanities and media studies over the last twenty years, including work on the fundamental notion of computation, new media forms, user interfaces, the culture of computing, humanistic use of technology.

Every group of students represents a different set of interests and skills, and so it is difficult (one might say futile) to create a tight schedule for a course like this in advance. For most of the semester, we will be learning new material on Wednesdays, engaging in spirited discussion of various readings on Fridays, and going over problem sets on Mondays. However, the basic pattern may change occasionally depending on the difficulty of the material or other factors.

There are no required papers for this course, and there is neither a midterm nor a final.

## 6 Additional Resources

My office is in Andrews 303. I hold regular office hours from 3:30 to 5:00 on Mondays and Wednesdays, but I'm also available by appointment. You can contact me via email at [sramsay@unlserve.unl.edu](mailto:sramsay@unlserve.unl.edu). My AIM nick is **FatherBusa**. Don't be shy!

There are several societies and associations for scholars working at the intersection of computing and the humanities: including, most prominently, The Association for Computers in the Humanities (<http://www.ach.org>), The Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing (<http://www.allc.org>), and the Society for Digital Humanities / Société pour l'étude des médias interactifs (<http://www.sdh-semi.org/>). The Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO) also maintains a website containing a great deal of information

about the field at <http://www.digitalhumanities.org>.

The main journals in the field are *Literary and Linguistic Computing* (<http://llc.oxfordjournals.org/>), *TEXT Technology* (<http://texttechnology.mcmaster.ca/>), and the brand new online journal *Digital Humanities Quarterly* (<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/>).

## 7 General Policies

All academic work must meet the standards set forth in Section 4.2 of the Undergraduate Bulletin (<http://www.unl.edu/unlpub/undergrad/>) concerning academic honesty. Each student is responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work. Students are also expected to arrive prepared and on time for all scheduled classes. The professor reserves the right to exact grade penalties (at his discretion) for failure to comply with the policies of the course.

If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, you will need to contact the Disability Resource Center for coordination in your academic accommodations. The DRC is located in the Reynolds Student Services Complex in Room 137. The DRC phone number is 895-0866. (TDD-895-0652).

The campus policy states that the instructor be informed of anticipated absences for religious holidays by the beginning of the second week of school.

**N. B. The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary. The authoritative version of this document is available at <http://segonku.unl.edu/syllabi/engl487-s07.pdf>**