

GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION: DIGITAL HUMANITIES PEDAGOGIES IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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The humanities, universities, and the world itself are amid multiple, overlapping crises. The COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and stay-at-home orders required shifts to online teaching that continue affecting how we teach and how students learn. Our Ukrainian and Russian colleagues' working conditions and, in turn, their students' learning conditions have been immeasurably shaped by the Russian war against Ukraine. Neo-fascist politics have been entering mainstream civic discourse, targeting minoritized racial and ethnic groups, refugees, and gender minorities – and even interfering with our freedom to teach students about these topics. A looming climate crisis preoccupies our students, as their depression and anxiety rates are on the rise. These challenges magnify the perpetual crisis of the humanities: dropping enrolments in humanities majors, budget cuts, and increasing casualization of academic labour. What a time to be teaching.

When the *IJHAC: A Journal of Digital Humanities* approached us with the editorial board's idea of a special issue on digital humanities pedagogy lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, we proposed to focus not only on the pandemic but on the many crises that are shaping how we teach digital humanities. After all, while some instructors first experienced teaching in times of crisis during the pandemic, many of our colleagues have been enduring and teaching under such conditions for a long time. We were delighted that the journal agreed to our proposal to develop a special issue based on the question of *how* to tackle the challenge of teaching digital humanities under such constraints.

Over the last decade, the body of research that examines digital humanities pedagogy has grown significantly. *Digital Humanities Pedagogy: Practices, Principles, and Politics* (2012), edited by Brett D. Hirsch, staked a claim for pedagogy as a legitimate and rigorous area of digital humanities scholarship.

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Throughout the *Debates in the Digital Humanities* series, edited by Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein, digital humanities pedagogy has gained visibility within the field. Now, publications on pedagogy routinely appear in journals like *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, *Digital Studies/Le champ numérique*, and *Reviews in Digital Humanities*. The *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy* has also established itself as a critical scholarly resource. Another issue of *IJHAC* partially focused on digital pedagogy is also currently in preparation.

The essays in the ‘Digital Humanities Pedagogies in Times of Crisis’ special issue of *IJHAC* build on this robust scholarly genealogy to explore how digital humanities pedagogy can adapt in response to the constraints encountered during myriad crises. As Roopika Risam and Alex Gil have proposed, doing digital humanities inevitably requires negotiating constraints.¹ These may include ‘lack of access to hardware or software, network capacity, technical education, or even a reliable power grid.’² The constraints of digital humanities can be driven by insufficient finances, infrastructures, and labor, as well as by limits to political agency (i.e., curtailed freedom of speech and censorship). Teaching digital humanities brings its own struggles. Students often come to us unsure of what digital humanities is or uncertain about their own technical capacity. They also may have little knowledge about the content areas in which we’re asking them to apply digital humanities methods. For those of us who teach digital humanities in the context of non-canonical subjects (e.g., minoritized racial or ethnic cultures, postcolonial contexts, queer and transgender studies), we also may contend with our students’ perceptions of the legitimacy and significance of these areas of study. Teaching in times of crisis only adds additional constraints to the fraught practices of digital humanities pedagogy, magnifying the challenges we already encounter. Moreover, neither crises nor challenges to pedagogy are experienced evenly across digital humanities instructors. Factors like geographical location, cultural context, and the very financial, infrastructural, and labour-drive constraints of instructors’ academic institutions means that they experience crises differentially.

Recognizing such diversity of experiences, contributors in this special issue explore how the goals, objectives, and pedagogical methods they use in the classroom have shifted in response to the manifold crises of our times. They demonstrate how those of us teaching digital humanities have collectively developed a significant body of knowledge on how to adapt, hack, and hotwire our teaching practices to respond to the needs of our students, educational institutions, and the wider community. The articles in this special issue demonstrate how instructors have drawn on the affordance of digital humanities in times of crisis, building on intra-institutional, inter-institutional, and even international collaboration to help students learn how to produce and disseminate

knowledge under constraints. While grounded in scholarship, contributions to this special issue feature reflection on what it means to teach digital humanities in times of crisis. We see this as a strength of the issue because being a reflective practitioner is one of the most critical components of excellent pedagogy.

Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic over the last three years, digital humanities pedagogy responses to the constraints posed by the pandemic emerged as a key theme in the essays in this special issue. Teresa Lobalsamo, Ethan Salerno Nogueira, Dellannia Segreti, and Adriano Pasquali's article, 'Humanities Pedagogy in a Pandemic Context: Maintaining High-Impact Practices in Virtual Classrooms,' discusses how they promoted academic honesty, facilitated peer-to-peer interactions, and created vital connections to contemporary Italian culture despite the limitations of remote pandemic teaching. The authors situate their digital humanities pedagogical innovations as 'high-impact practices,' or educational practices that promote student engagement and learning.

One of the challenges of incorporating high impact practices into teaching — under crisis-induced constraints or otherwise — is how to assess them. Emily Christina Murphy's essay, 'Crises, Fast and Slow: A Contract-Grading Response in Digital Humanities Pedagogy,' discusses how alternate approaches to grading offered a humane approach to assessment that was responsive to the constraints of the pandemic. At once theoretical and practical, the essay explores how contract grading can be used to scaffold a core course assignment and its impact on classroom equity. The insights on contract grading that Murphy's essay offers in the context of digital humanities pedagogy has broader implications for teaching beyond the pandemic.

The impact of the pandemic has shed light on the types of labour needed to support digital humanities pedagogy. Ruth Carpenter and Amy Gay's essay, 'What We Did Then and What We Do Now: A Crisis of Digital Scholarship Champions at Binghamton University,' examines how cultivating stakeholders who can advocate for digital humanities is a crucial task for supporting digital humanities pedagogy. The loss of champions to new jobs and other institutions poses a challenge to digital humanities pedagogical efforts, particularly when times are tough. Reflecting on their experiences, Carpenter and Gay call for additional scholarly attention to the role of the digital scholarship champion in burgeoning digital humanities initiatives.

The lessons of the pandemic also have lasting implications for digital humanities pedagogy. Jacquelyne Thoni Howard and Rachel Tabor's 'From a Crisis Response to Feminist Talking Circles: Reconsidering Collaborative Feedback Practices in the Digital Humanities' takes a feminist approach to digital humanities pedagogy in times of crisis. They discuss feminist meeting frameworks, intentional uses of Zoom affordances to promote inclusive spaces


for learning and communication, and welcoming feedback processes. At the heart of Howard and Tabor's intervention lies a feminist ethics of care. In the spirit of care work, they strived to move beyond the emergency nature of online teaching at the beginning of the pandemic and, instead, developed a compelling methodology that was responsive to the circumstances. At a moment when universities are striving to get 'back to normal' and to leave remote teaching in the recent past, Howard and Tabor remind us that we might emerge from the pandemic with more nuanced approaches to integrating video conferencing technologies into digital humanities pedagogy.

Authors in the issue also explored digital humanities pedagogies in the context of the simultaneous crises of our current moment. In 'Doctoral Teaching and Mentoring in Digital Humanities: Changing Approaches to Graduate Pedagogy in Times of Multiple Crises,' Bailey Betik and Alexander Cors report on the efforts of Emory University's Center for Digital Scholarship. Situating their work at the intersections of the COVID-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, and increasing amounts of precarious labor that fuel academic institutions, Betik and Cors reflect on changes made to programming for doctoral students in response to these challenges. Their teaching beyond the classroom highlights the importance of developing multiple strategies and approaches that are responsive to not only students' needs but also the circumstances in which they are learning about digital humanities.

Addressing a crisis that is currently roiling higher education, John Chun and Katherine Elkins's article, 'The Crisis of Artificial Intelligence: A New Digital Humanities Curriculum for Human-Centered AI,' reports on a successful curricular initiative. They make the case for the importance of teaching 'Artificial Intelligence Digital Humanities' (AI DH), particularly in light of the ways AI hold the potential to exacerbate contemporaneous crises, like the state of higher education today, the lack of diversity in the tech industry, and the social and economic inequities facilitated by emerging technologies. Elkins and Chun's curricular programming offers an important avenue for marshalling the insights of the critical AI area of digital humanities scholarship into a new approach to teaching that builds students' capacities to intervene in the development of AI technologies.

Together, the articles in this special issue offer useful insights that can be applied to a wide variety of constraints in which digital humanities is taught today — and new ones that might emerge in the future. After all, crisis, it seems, is endemic. Our issue is not intended to be a definitive answer to the question of how we can adapt digital humanities pedagogies to respond to crises but the beginning of a conversation that articulates an adaptable and flexible approach to teaching digital humanities.

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END NOTES

¹ R. Risam and A. Gil, 'Introduction: The Questions of Minimal Computing,' *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 16 (2022): n.p., <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/16/2/000646/000646.html>.

² Risam and Gil, n.p.