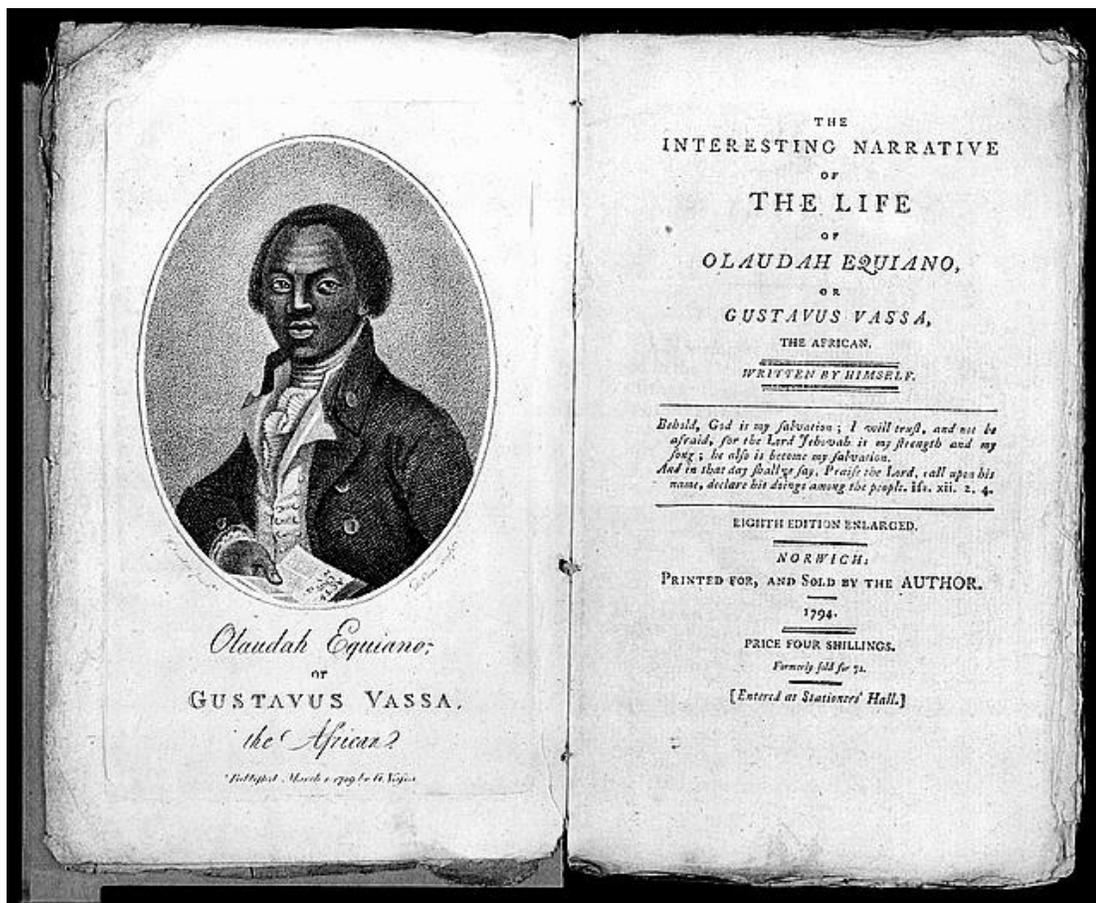


RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

A Hacker in Every History Department: An Intelligent Radical's Guide to the Digital Humanities

By Claire Bond Potter



COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Are most college professors likely to be replaced by underpaid adjuncts that manage hundreds of students online? It seems so. Humanities departments that are already adjunct-heavy see their universities experimenting with substituting Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), taught by highly paid stars at major research institutions, for surveys and other foundation courses. Could the adjunct crisis get worse than it is? Sure it could, according to the United States Department of Labor (DOL), which projects that although higher education will continue to move away from tenure-track work, "opportunities are expected to be good for part-time or adjunct professors." The DOL also projects that some fields, such as health specialties and nursing, will experience better job prospects than others, *such as the humanities*" (emphasis mine). My own field, history, is expected to gain only 4,000 jobs over the next decade, many of which will be neither full-time nor tenure track.¹

Many historians, and other humanists, lay partial responsibility for this unfolding disaster at the door of the Internet. "Anybody who pays attention to the vast literature on educational technology should be familiar with the term *unbundling*," historian Jonathan Rees writes. "Educational reformers use it to connote the kind of division of labor and specialization that Frederick Taylor adored. Why should anybody provide content for their classrooms, they ask rhetorically, when the best professors in the world can be piped in via the Internet?" Although most MOOCs currently rely on peer grading, that will change if they are integrated into credit-bearing degree requirements. If it is hard to imagine low-cost graders being recruited from a global labor pool of debt-ridden humanities graduate students and jobless Ph.D.s, further immiserated by the loss of the piece work they currently perform, don't worry: Amazon's Mechanical Turk has pioneered a model called "crowd working" in which home workers with a wireless connection (known as "Turkers") lowball each other for intellectual or mental labor, earning as little as \$2.00 an hour.²

Imagine a historian working in computer labs with students to map Olaudah Equiano's long journey from slavery to freedom.

Could technology turn the next generation of college humanities professors into highly educated menial laborers? Perhaps, if this is what intellectuals will agree to become and students will agree, or are forced, to accept as teachers. It is easy to imagine the dystopia of pre-packaged humanities courses being sold over the Internet, credit by credit, because they already are: not just by for-profit entities like the University of Phoenix, but also by statewide public university systems. In February 2014, the state of Tennessee announced a plan to use \$34 million of state lottery profits to eliminate tuition in the state's public community colleges and technical schools, a budget

increase that hardly seems sufficient for such a bold move. Will expanding on-line learning for all of Tennessee's campuses also be on the agenda? Probably: Tennessee already offers undergraduate degrees and technical certification online through its Regents Online Campus Collaborative. This has been the trend: Political and corporate commitments to expanding higher education through methods that make faculty work redundant, or cheap.³

But this is not where technology has to take us. Digital humanities scholars know that computers make us smarter, more creative and less replaceable by machines working alone.⁴ We also know, as historian Ann Little, infers, that the problem with MOOCs is not technology. They disseminate knowledge on a massive scale, but they also reproduce the worst features of traditional pedagogy in their scale, impersonality and lack of pedagogical connection. MOOCs "feed the lie that reduces teaching to lecturing, and the misapprehension that we are indifferent to our audience, caring nothing about their comprehension, confusion, or questions," Little argues, noting (as many others have) that the students for whom on-line learning is the most affordable and accessible choice are often the students who are least likely to succeed in any educational setting without personal help.⁵

Now imagine a digitally trained scholar in every humanities department, one who connects students and colleagues to their counterparts – and emerging jobs – in science, engineering, business, politics and media, to move the humanities out into a world suffused with the digital.

Now imagine an alternative to this scenario of de-professionalization: historians not yelling at the kids in the back row to put their cell phones away, but answering questions that are being projected on the class Twitter feed at the front of the room. Imagine a historian working in computer labs with students to map Olaudah Equiano's long journey from slavery to freedom. Imagine hackers with history Ph.D.s in actual history departments who understand how to evaluate them for tenure and promotion, not squirreled away in a center or institute where they only talk to other hackers. Imagine scholarly and archival projects that are "born digital," requiring highly technical preservation and maintenance by historians trained to the task. In other words, imagine computerized teaching and scholarship as a source of new well-paid university jobs that preserve and promote the humanities.

Now imagine a digitally trained scholar in every humanities department, one who connects students and colleagues to their counterparts – and emerging jobs – in science, engineering, business, politics and media, to move the humanities out into a world suffused with the digital. Some universities are beginning to grasp this vision. For

example, in fall 2014, the University of Southern California is rolling out a five year program funded by the Mellon Foundation to expand multi-media literacy, digitize archives and give conventionally trained Ph.D.s the training in digital humanities (DH) that could make them eligible for such work.⁶

For many of us, digital technologies have not only been intellectually renewing, they have provided openings for radical scholarship and scholarly interventions that simply do not exist in the academic world we have inherited. Social media – Facebook, Twitter, and blogging – have become particularly generative spaces for questioning the academic status quo, exchanging ideas about radical scholarship and pedagogy, and creating space for democratic exchanges between faculty across lines of status, field, and institution. In 2006, as part of my desire to speak more bluntly about the conservatism of the academic enterprise, I started a blog, *Tenured Radical*, whose title riffed off of the culture wars rhetoric of the 1980s and 1990s, justifying cuts in academic jobs (specifically, the title of Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*, 1990).⁷ Since then, I have acquired close friends and collaborators who are appointed at public and state universities, community colleges, and Christian colleges, who are on renewable contracts, who are more than full-time adjuncts, and who are graduate students.

These conversations have changed me. But a funny thing

happened on the way to the blogosphere. I became persuaded, entirely by accident and without training, that digital technology had the power to radicalize my pedagogy and scholarship as well as my professional networks and non-scholarly writing. I learned that the vast majority of digital humanists have been, like me, predominantly autodidacts with traditional doctoral educations. We are also people who often have a keen sense of what the humanities ought to be as a twenty-first century intellectual practice that can democratize access to knowledge. I noticed something else as well: too often my colleagues reflexively viewed codex-based humanities as a treasured “high” culture by comparison to digital humanities’ “low” and middlebrow cultures. At best, the traditional humanities provide content for digital environments that pander to people who will no longer read books and students who write in a strange argot that evades grammar, spelling, punctuation and good manners: “Hi r u going 2 be in office hours 2day?”

They could not be more wrong. Integrating digital literacy into doctoral educations could not only save the humanities, it could be part of a strategy to make Ph.D.s employable outside the academy and, in the process, revitalize full-time academic jobs. It would allow us to argue for new academic lines that articulate, rather than gesture to, the links between a humanities education,

global public life in the digital age and twenty-first century work. At the same time, training doctoral students as hackers would give sophisticated humanities scholars the vision and skills to work in cultural and political jobs where both the digitally illiterate and those without sophisticated cultural training are increasingly unemployable. Finally, what if politicians could not rely on a steady stream of unemployable Ph.D.s to renew and refill the adjunct army? If humanities scholars had clear and viable employment options outside the university, higher education would be forced to compete for, rather than exploit, our teaching labor.

Putting a digital scholar in every humanities department could help academics become intellectually and economically flexible in an educational policy environment where the word “flexibility” has become the property of the bosses: an argument for employing practitioners in higher education rather than cultivating tenured or permanent, teaching faculty.⁸ Making the hacker’s primary characteristic – the capacity and desire to change to meet new challenges – a characteristic of all humanities departments might be the reform that helps our work regain its social and economic value. In other words, it may be time (to paraphrase DH scholars Dan Cohen and Joseph Scheinfeldt) to hack the academy.⁹

Fears that technology could destroy intellectual employment, even in its currently beleaguered state, are not outlandish. Technology has

“unbundled” forms of middle-class labor as different as book selling, nursing and the law.¹⁰ Technology has also facilitated unwelcome changes in the university workplaces that we associate with the emergence of a “corporate university” that, following a for-profit model, has outsourced as many forms of labor as possible. Eliminating full-time, tenure-track faculty work has been part of a long-term strategy to redirect public funds away from non-profit and towards for-profit education by eliminating public subsidies for tuition and loans and shifting institutional funds disproportionately to sports programs and administrators who are paid like corporate executives.

However, in the classroom, digital humanities (DH) practices work quite differently. They privilege: student research over top down pedagogies that can be easily reproduced in online environments; the cultivation of critical practices over standardized curricula and testing; and the opening of archives and other primary sources to non-specialists. Best of all, the “bottom up” and collaborative nature of a digital humanities practice reopen classic texts for new forms of investigative practice that not only take the digital to the humanities, but make the humanities relevant to an increasingly digitized world.

The idea that technology can only result in job loss has emerged in an environment where even progressive academics insist on regaining what has been lost before



TENURED RADICAL

The 3.0 edition

CLAIRE POTTER'S BLOG

reexamining the sustainability and relevance of their own practices.¹¹ Arguably, communications technologies have sparked incremental (and sometimes seismic) changes over time: as they destroy jobs they create new ones. If expert manuscript copyists saw their jobs ending in 1455 when Johannes Gutenberg's first Bibles were pressed, what they did not live to see was that making cheap books available to the public created centuries of mass employment, much of it quite well paid.¹²

Humanists often cannot see the possibilities of digital technology for their own and their students' employment because they see it as the opposite of what they do and value. The Internet is closely associated with changes that many scholars experience as only destructive: the disappearance of physical books from libraries and distance learning. They resent the enhanced opportunities for student cheating over the Internet that have, in turn, prompted the compulsory use of teaching software like Turnitin.com to catch plagiarists.¹³ Computerization has also made it plausible to increase faculty workloads with work that used to be done by unionized secretaries, assistant registrars, mailroom attendants, student affairs and human resources administrators and travel agents.¹⁴

There is no question that digital technology has changed what it means to be a college teacher, and done so at a time when salaries of all but the best-paid stars have gone flat. Because of all this new work (particularly email, where committee meetings metastasize into days of "reply to all" conversations and which students prefer to office hours), computers also make the modern faculty home a site for time-consuming drudgery that stretches into evenings and weekends. Although we also use them for various forms of play like Netflix, posting Grumpy Cat memes, and viewing baby pictures, when it comes to our scholarly lives, computers too often feel like brooms, not pens. They exhaust us, and often make those who are not digitally literate feel uncharacteristically incompetent. At a recent professional meeting, a prominent historian expressed to me his frustration that the university bought him a new computer every two years, but had never sent someone to teach him how to use it. In other words, his computer actually makes him feel not smarter, as the research would suggest, but stupider!

The impression that technology is complicit in destroying scholarly work is particularly understandable when you consider that as computers were on the rise in the 1970s and 1980s, the academic labor market was contracting. Personal computers arrived on humanists' office desks around 1992, close to the time that the American Historical Association pronounced adjunct labor a "troubling" problem that was "most acute" in the humanities.¹⁵ In his 1993 novel, *Japanese By Spring*, Ishmael Reed foresaw that the disempowerment of

industrial and office workers that began in the 1970s and accelerated in the 1980s could be easily turned on university professors. Reed's antihero, Benjamin "Chappie" Puttbutt, a self-absorbed African American Studies professor who surfs literary fads, is besieged by racism, left-wing political correctness and a negative tenure decision. Salvation arrives, in the form of a Japanese corporation that purchases the college as a for-profit enterprise. Puttbutt adapts to his new situation by

becoming a neoconservative and taking Japanese lessons, reflecting that "If the Asian thing was going to fly" he "wanted to at least be in coach". The Japanese chief executive officer, seeing Puttbutt as a visionary rather than the shallow failure that he is, makes him president of the college, putting him in charge of all his tenured enemies. He fires them.¹⁶

Published just as humanists were beginning to adopt email, a basic digital tool developed by academic and military scientists in 1971,¹⁷ the plot of *Japanese By Spring* turns on many familiar fears. Primary among them is that digital technologies will inevitably give institutions new tools for making the vast majority of faculty redundant, and will exacerbate what is already a serious problem of underemployment in the humanities. Accompanying this fear, however, is a failure to understand the intellectual work that computers are now making possible, such as gaming, web-based projects, mapping, and the software-enabled possibility of visualizing narrative, change over time, and chronology. The idea that digital humanities are just a passing and knowledge-degrading fad is spoken and unspoken among many colleagues, even those who themselves had to fight hard to establish new fields in Marxist, ethnic, gender and queer studies.

My own field, history, makes an excellent case study for the interventions digital scholarship could make in the dismal employment situation. Among humanists, historians were "early adopters" of computerized technologies and among the first to imagine how digital platforms could create a university without walls.¹⁸ However, as a disciplinary group, across political and institutional lines, historians are likely to view digital humanities projects as unscholarly by comparison to traditional monographs, articles, dissertations, and essay-based classroom pedagogies. (As one highly-placed wag said over a beer at the 2014 American Historical Association (AHA) annual meeting, "Historians study change; we don't recommend it.")¹⁹

Evidence for digital historians' marginalization within their discipline is, ironically, the successful institutionalization of digital and new media technologies *outside history departments* in the form of well-known institutes like George Mason's Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, City University of New York's



American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning (ASHP/CML), and the University of Virginia's Center for Digital History (home to historian Edward Ayers' Valley of the Shadow project.) Only in 2014 did the discipline's largest professional association, the AHA, establish a committee to write guidelines for hiring, promotion and tenure in digital history, a full two decades after the creation of the Rosenzweig Center and three decades after the creation of the ASHP/CML.²⁰

As a discipline, history provides numerous challenges to digital humanities' emphasis on transparent intellectual design and public engagement. Although grounded in the scientific pragmatism of the late nineteenth century, historians often shy away from discussing their own methods.²¹ Archivists, oral historians, museum curators, and public historians are clear examples of the publicly engaged scholarship to which many historians aspire. Yet book-writing scholars often view these employed, robust practitioners of the discipline as less worthy than the Ph.D. who holds out grimly for a position on the tenure-track, despite chances that fade as each year as an adjunct passes. In spite of its popularity as a major, a field for graduate study, and as a pastime for every kind of entertainment from pleasure reading to videogames, history is also among the disciplines worst affected by the turn to contingent labor.

In 2013, the AHA gathered comprehensive job data for 2011-2012 and found that openings for historians in higher education had declined by 7.3% in a year in which the economy had actually improved. Furthermore, for those of us who follow acrimonious blog posts written by frustrated job seekers, history is also an excellent example of the disdain for market-based decision-making among humanities scholars more generally. Graduate students seem to pursue degrees in history, and specializations within it, out of intellectual passion rather than any evidence that it will make them employable. In 2011-2012, there were over two new Ph.D.s produced for every entry-level job. That ratio is closer to 3:1 for United States history, 1.5:1 for European, slightly over 1:1 for Latin American and Middle Eastern; and there were not enough new Ph.D.'s completed in North America to fill available jobs in Asian history.²²

The demand for digital historians was infinitesimal, although there was a clear bump from previous years. Out of 1,158 total jobs, only 60—or 5%—specified a primary or secondary specialization in digital history.²³ However, the AHA seemed not to know how many graduate students had completed their training in digital history under senior faculty members, as we would expect from job candidates in other fields, or whether successful job seekers had cobbled together a program of training on their own. Despite the growing importance of digital skills to nearly every form of professional work, academic or non-academic, the vast majority of history and other humanities Ph.D.s are trained as they were prior to the Internet revolution: to produce, read, and teach written texts that are either printed on paper or available in electronic formats that simulate printed paper.²⁴ Students who had credentials in the field were more likely to have

acquired them in media studies, archives, and information technology degree programs or through fellowships and mentoring in digital history centers.²⁵

Departments who hired digital historians last year may, or may not, have understood the potential this field has for altering intellectual power relations within intellectual fields where authority is usually defined by seniority, longevity, experience and deep knowledge of subject. DH, while not uninterested in these things, tends to emphasize the hacker ethic of "doing the work": experimentation, new methods, making sense of unwieldy and odd data, the capacity for creative transformation, experimentation, visualization, interdisciplinarity, accessible publishing styles, engagement with everyday texts and archives, and bottom-up knowledge production. As a scholarly model, it values collaborative wisdom above an individual hero-scholar's triumph over the archive.²⁶

As a teaching field, DH also emphasizes "flipped" classrooms: learning styles that emphasize gaming, collaboration, problem solving and acquisition of knowledge outside of class so that it can be put to practical, creative use during class time. This practice initially emerged among math and science teachers in secondary schools and has trickled up to university classrooms. It encourages students to develop their own authority rather than to mimic forms of authority modeled by the teacher. In its most basic form it inverts the teaching of facts and the problem solving that normally occurs when students are preparing written assignments or synthesizing the material they have learned. Historians who believe in the lecture as a pedagogy may record a video and post it with several primary documents and readings, using the virtual tools that most universities now provide (Black Board, Canvas), free blogging software (Word Press, Blogger) or social media (Facebook, tumblr). Synthesis of the material occurs in class, usually in the form of group problem solving.²⁷

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Because flipping does not lead the class towards an analysis or critical reading already established in the scholarly literature, it holds out the distinct possibility that those students will teach the teacher. As Peter Stearns, the Provost of George Mason University, wrote in August 2012, in his flipped version of the Introduction to World History,

he intended to use class time to ask students to think deeply about historical problems that “involve comparison, or causation, or testing the significance of change. It will, I hope, at least by the second half of the course, involve determining local versus global factors in shaping human societies.” Martha Hollander, an associate professor of art history at Hofstra University, uses what she calls “a modified version of ‘flipping,’” in her classes, posting images, video lectures and critical work online, then requiring students to blog about it to generate topics for class discussion. Class time is then devoted to group work that helps them prepare to write more formal papers, “working individually or in groups to research an unknown object to answer certain questions; reading texts and analyzing objects in light of them, then posting their findings and conclusions to a Blackboard site.”²⁸

What this requires is something that most online courses—certainly not MOOCs with tens of thousands of visitors—can achieve: a teacher in the classroom, moving from group to group, offering guidance and additional readings that students discover they need. In one of my flipped courses, “New York City Activists and Their Worlds,” I determined to help students explore Greenwich Village’s history as a hotbed of queer activism by teaching the class in the Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library. The course began with a bare-bones syllabus. There were very few readings, and those addressed not content, or a field, but methodological and ethical approaches to writing about a recent activist past. Students chose collections to work in (the ACTUP oral history collection, the Jonathan Ned Katz Papers, and the Gran Fury Collection were a few) and then sorted themselves into working groups to decide how to produce a project that would interest other people in the collection and make it available as a teaching tool. Students were encouraged to use skills they already had to design the projects and to teach other people in the group what they learned. Projects that emerged from the class were:

- One group updated graphics originally designed by the Gran Fury collective in the 1980s for twenty-first-century safe-sex campaigns. This meant working with survivors of the collective to ensure that the designs did not violate the original intent and printing the mash-up designs on tee shirts that were sold at cost.
- Four students re-printed Jonathan Ned Katz’s play, *Coming Out!* (1975) as a downloadable ebook for use by high school students, embedding documents, illustrations and citations in the text that allowed those putting on the play to gain a deeper knowledge of twentieth-century gay and lesbian liberation in the United States.

- Three students developed an ongoing collaboration with ACTUP.org and are helping to produce transcripts and videos for eventual display on the web.

In each case, students worked directly from the archival collections. Week-by-week, I worked with them to develop bibliography and project design.

This brief description suggests that I did very little work on the course. In fact I did another kind of work: teaching collaborative skills, absorbing what students were interested in and leading them back to the traditional scholarship they required for a deeper understanding of the material, and supplying examples of other digital history projects that might inform their project design. In my case, a flipped classroom was one in which I collaborated with students to bring their projects into being, rather than insisting on a particular path to a particular outcome. It also meant that at the end of the semester, each student had a project that could be given to a potential employer as an example of humanities knowledge that was potentially transferrable to other kinds of paid cultural work.



ACTUP ARCHIVES

As a field, digital humanities, like the sciences and work in the world outside the university, emphasizes collaboration and cooperation with a team rather than the forms of independent achievement that are typical of academic labor in the humanities. DH scholars collaborate with each other and with their students in the creation of “born digital” projects, freestanding research that is open to reinterpretation by

other teachers, students and curious members of the public. The *Valley of the Shadow* project, for example, directed by historian and University of Richmond president Edward Ayers, was built by students and currently allows other students to explore the Civil War through the digitized records of two communities, one Union and one Confederate. Since 2011, Japanese historian Alan Christy has been the faculty leader of *ROUTES*, a student-created DH project at UC Santa Cruz that tells the story of the Japanese World War II experience through personal narratives and images. With Alice Yang, Christy has created a translingual website that makes World War II documents and memories available to citizens in Japan, Korea, China, and the Philippines.²⁹

By contrast, graduate study in the humanities continues to emphasize preparation for twentieth-century pedagogies characterized by top down structures of authority in which faculty lecture and choose topics for discussion. These pedagogies privilege what Paolo Freire critiqued as “knowledge banking,”³⁰ rather than knowledge creation, replicating for an undergraduate audience the skills and subject matter the historian has learned through intensive study. Trained to receive knowledge gifts from

their mentors and improve on them, entering cohorts of new college teachers are sometimes underprepared for a student population, much less for a society, characterized by swiftly proliferating and changing information, digital archives, and user-friendly information technology.

Even after the recent revelation that introductory courses might be replaced by MOOCs, history departments do not seem to have really grasped that knowledge-banking models are the single pedagogy most easily replicated by corporate entities. Every stage of becoming a professional historian involves a high degree of replication, and thus is the exact opposite of a digital world that values creativity, change, and accessibility. Rather than reforming *what we can do* as humanities scholars, historians have sought to make *what we have always done* more rigorous and have insisted ever more loudly on its core value as an enterprise.

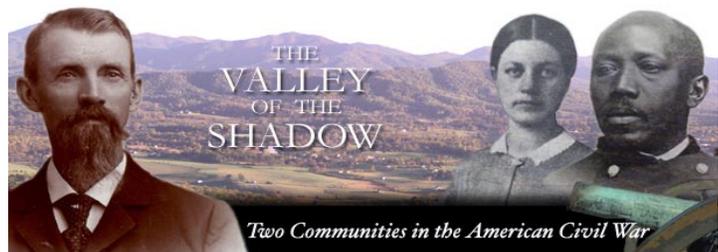
Scholars on the left may also need to make a more honest assessment about whether what counted as radical knowledge a quarter century ago – feminist, critical race, queer and post-colonial studies – ever radicalized dominant practices within American higher education. I would argue that they did not. Course materials are still generally delivered in 10-15 week terms, or in 3 hour, 90-minute or 50- minute class periods, regardless of how the subject might best be conveyed. The vast majority of college professors still assign written essays and exams that they detest grading and students dread writing. Lecturing and text-based discussion are not necessarily radical pedagogies simply because the material presented confounds intellectual orthodoxies.

The lecture, leavened by a few student questions, or the passing around of a document, is still the primary mode of undergraduate instruction in history, as it is in the MOOC. Hence the importance of the “job talk” in the interviewing process is not just to make sure that a candidate can present research in a fashion that is entirely unchanged since history departments were formed in the 1880s. It also serves to demonstrate, perhaps with the aid of a Power Point presentation, the young historian’s competence in the most conventional and central historical pedagogy. If they are not trained specifically in public history, job candidates are rarely, if ever, asked to solve a problem during a job interview; organize students into a collaborative project; imagine a use for their research outside the academy; or explain how their scholarly practice builds bridges to activism or to nonacademic communities. Nor are job candidates asked to imagine the scholarly pathways that might lead undergraduate, or graduate students to non-academic and professional labor.

I do not fault conventionally trained historians for the employment crisis itself. However, it should come as no surprise that policy makers and education critics believe that curricula based on knowledge banking pedagogy could be easily and cheaply conveyed through information delivery systems that complain less and need no health insurance.³¹ Continuing to insist on the “timeless value” of the humanities may never have been a substantive way to talk about the project of higher education. However, it seems like an exceptionally poor strategy in a moment

when the financial sacrifices students and their families make for education produce heightened anxiety about whether a B.A. will actually lead to employment. Unless we are willing to explain why the critical, research and writing skills we value are applicable to an increasingly technological and global workplace, historians and their fellow humanists can expect to have an increasingly difficult time making a case for themselves.³²

History departments and, more surprisingly, graduate students themselves often see a solution to the job crisis in educating fewer historians. Although most professional organizations, including the AHA, are putting more energy into highlighting how a historian can take conventional training to different kinds of employment, increasingly the consensus seems to be among leading doctoral programs that the only solution to unemployment is to reconfigure supply and demand, by shrinking doctoral programs and removing excess job candidates from the market. Other suggestions emphasize the practice of conventionally academic history outside the university. Stanford University recently offered its unemployed Ph.D.s the opportunity to return to school for free to retrain as high school teachers. In a series of 2011 articles in the American Historical Association’s *Perspectives*, Anthony Grafton and Jim Grossman proposed that graduate



programs modify themselves to make their students employable in related fields: museum studies, archives and public history. Most recently, the AHA has developed a new section of its newsletter called “Career Paths” that features articles about historians who have successfully transitioned into non-academic careers.³³

What these approaches presume, however, is that with some slight modification, the skills historians are currently taught in graduate school are sufficient. As one commenter on my blog observed, the Grafton and Grossman proposal failed to imagine that “history departments need to change their curricula to train historians for a wider range of jobs.” Another saw the scope of the plan as too small to begin with. “The goal in the future is going to have to be to find ways of engaging the public beyond the confines of the classroom,” a second commenter observed, “or the narrow academic audiences of scholarly journals and small academic presses.” Other commenters expressed skepticism, based on their own experience on the non-academic job market, that the training currently offered in history Ph.D. programs prepared graduate students for anything but conventional teaching and scholarship and worried that additional training would prolong a degree that now takes seven to nine years to complete.³⁴

The length of time to degree makes both faculty and students reluctant to imagine other kinds of training that might be added to the Ph.D. curriculum to make humanists employable outside the academy. On the other hand, many programs simply do not want to know because they do not see students who are working off the tenure track as an advertisement for their program. Several graduate students I talked to said that when departments listed graduates on their websites, those with jobs outside of history were often left off the list entirely. "I think it's more critical that grad programs get away from the culture that a tenure-track job is the only thing you can do with the skills a PhD provides," said Ian Lekus, a history Ph.D. from Duke, now in an alt-ac job after a decade of temporary full-time positions, "since those jobs are disappearing. That culture change (and encouraging grad students to understand the skills they are developing) is more critical than curricular change."³⁵

John D'Emilio, retiring from the University of Illinois-Chicago, and who worked for a number of years at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, is skeptical that the current crop of senior faculty are capable of creating the necessary change that would link history Ph.D.s to public work. "I honestly don't see it coming from changes made in the curriculum itself," he wrote to me. "I see it coming by grad students building up experience by working with and in organizations that mean something to them and building up a resume that way. As a grad student I had experience as a free-lance writer for publishers that then served me well in working for non-profits that needed someone to write fact sheets and position papers. The participation that I had with activist organizations helped me get paying jobs with other such organizations. The writing skills and abilities to analyze and think and express myself clearly and intelligently became entry points to organizational work that would have constituted an alternate career if I had stayed with it."

Although books and traditional scholarship are not going away any time soon, culture work is going on the web at a rapid pace. Students with Ph.D.s who do not have basic digital skills, and more importantly, the flexibility and desire to learn the digital tools they will need to function in a political, corporate, or literary journalistic enterprise are at a great disadvantage.

Yet, these comments, as another colleague pointed out, "place too much burden on the individual grad student to gain experience." So what curricular changes could be made? And how does digital humanities create a model for these changes?

Humanities Ph.D. programs should also be exposing their students to work opportunities in the same way that they bring graduate students into the classroom to help them learn how to teach. Cal State-Fullerton is modeling a

way to bring that kind of engaged learning into their master's program in American Studies. "We are now trying to formalize an internship program with some local nonprofits so students can go alt-ac if they prefer," writes historian Erica Ball. "The more practical the experience, the better." There are also plenty of opportunities to develop skills inside the university, many of which are highly useful on or off the tenure track. Graduate students might be asked to spend a semester of their fellowship in the provost's office, the university archives, the university press, the development and public relations offices, with an eye to learning how to function in a business environment, read a budget and learn the digital tools that modern non-profit management relies on.

Although books and traditional scholarship are not going away any time soon, culture work is going on the web at a rapid pace. Students with Ph.D.s who do not have basic digital skills, and more importantly, the flexibility and desire to learn the digital tools they will need to function in a political, corporate, or literary journalistic enterprise are at a great disadvantage. A department hacker can train future digital historians, but that hacker can also link the skills that D'Emilio describes above to a variety of work environments where technological competence is a requirement. "You want to make a Humanities Ph.D. employable?" a former academic wrote to me. "Make sure they learn HTML, CSS, XML, TEI, the programming language du jour. Have them take information science classes and learn web development."

This focus on what happens in graduate school, and how hiring a hacker could help create the necessary transformation in curriculum, pedagogy and focus offers us a radical possibility: digital tools make movement between publics, as well as between jobs, possible for historians. It is in this context that some of us who have benefitted from a conventional university education, and have discovered the power of digital technology for teaching and creative thought, are addressing the urgent question of what kinds of transformations might put humanities scholars back to work on the tenure track, to revamp what counts as a humanities education that is relevant to the twenty-first century, and off the tenure-track, to take humanities experts into a cultural and political world that is increasingly web-based. Furthermore, by expanding what counts as employability in the humanities, we might then force universities to compete for humanists just as they now compete for scientists and administrators.

I am often asked what someone with a digital humanities Ph.D. or a discipline-based scholar whose intellectual work occurred in a DH environment could do. My question is: what can't they do if they are well trained in technology; open to learning and creative experimentation; good writers and critical thinkers; and they are culturally sophisticated? Most importantly, a DH scholar in every history department and every graduate program in the country could begin to bring their colleagues into the twenty-first century that everyone else is living and working in. They could jump-start history projects that make the humanities we know and love relevant to a community of digital learners who are not necessarily in school, who believe in open-sourced

everything, who are skeptical of authority and institutions, who write stories by programming video games, and who do not believe that putting your ideas down on paper is the only, or even the best, way to think.

An immediate way for every North American history department to intervene in the job crisis would be to advertise, over the next three years, at least one open-field, tenure-track job in digital history. Bringing in digital history colleagues who are also trained in traditional fields would help to address the high level of ignorance in most departments about what many perceive to be the intellectual, professional and pedagogical dangers of computerized scholarship.³⁶ MOOCs are not the only digital learning environment that technology can produce, nor do digital tools and environments dictate the intellectual content, pedagogy or staffing of courses. Digital history can involve the use of social media to create community outside the classroom or discussion inside it. It can teach new research methods that are particularly urgent as our archival work and secondary reading become digital. It can introduce students to new methodological techniques that allow them to read and understand primary documents differently. It can show how narrative emerges from chronology through the use of timeline software. And it can involve the creation of argument through mapping software.

These are among the tools that not only bring digital knowledge to the humanities, but—more importantly—update the humanities for a digital twenty-first century world that desperately needs them. By treating digital knowledge as if it were optional, we are training new generations of graduate students to fear technology, or worse, hide their DH projects from their mentors for fear that they will be perceived as intellectually unserious. Several years ago, I consulted with a prestigious department whose faculty and graduate students were distraught because no new Ph.D. had been awarded a tenure-track job the year before. I met with numerous graduate students in office hours. Each had a dream DH project or an idea of how they might translate their humanities degree to a non-university job through technology. Each asked me not to reveal these plans to their mentors, however, for fear of being viewed as unserious in their scholarly ambitions.

If we imagine digital literacy as an urgent project, which I believe it is, we should be pressing universities on the following points: Why not more Ph.D.s, many trained to work outside the university, rather than less? Why can't all Ph.D. programs in the humanities be reformed to include training in digital tools (something most graduate students either do not learn or learn independently of their course of study) and to privilege the ways that technology transforms the world of ideas? Why can't a humanities Ph.D. have a choice: either stay in the university to drive the next stage of transformation in the humanities or return to the digital public sphere as a well-employed radical intellectual?

The radical project within the academy will be to persuade colleagues that the humanities continue to be relevant to a digitized world, but that something more is

now needed. To return to the frustrated colleague I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, the one who does not know how to use his computer. This scholar, who is a highly sought after graduate mentor, does not yet imagine the transformative possibilities of the digital. He imagines a nice technician walking him through the basics of Word, Power Point and how to access the wireless Internet signal in his department. This pleasant, well-spoken young person would, in his dreams, teach him how to optimize his computer's capacity as a typewriter and postal service so that he can go on doing his scholarship in the ways he always has. He has not dreamt that she could use mapping or timeline technology as an alternative to writing a book; flip her classroom with Prezis, Facetime, Facebook, mp4 files, tumblr and blogs; or have her students make a film rather than write an essay. Nor has he dreamt that something other than a book (ok – maybe an ebook!) would be the centerpiece of a promotion case.

To follow this line of thought, then, despite the fact that younger people are more likely to be familiar with digital worlds, this colleague's graduate students may not value, acquire or develop digital humanities skills. This puts them in a very fragile position when it comes time to translate the Ph.D. into paid, full-time labor. They may be unemployable, except as candidates for the highly traditional tenure-track jobs that are growing scarcer or the contingent jobs that are proliferating in their place. This will not be because they have Ph.D.s in the humanities. It will be because they do not understand how intellectuals outside the university think or what they do, and they cannot connect what they know to the world the vast majority of citizens are living in.

If we imagine digital literacy as an urgent project, which I believe it is, we should be pressing universities on the following points: Why not more Ph.D.s, many trained to work outside the university, rather than less? Why can't all Ph.D. programs in the humanities be reformed to include training in digital tools (something most graduate students either do not learn or learn independently of their course of study) and to privilege the ways that technology transforms the world of ideas?

It is a common response to the crisis in employment for humanities Ph.D.s that university budget policies concentrating compensation in a few high status positions – administrators, coaches, star faculty – are the principle bars to full and humane academic employment. That is true to some degree. We know the results of these policies. Football programs that lose tens of millions of dollars a year and performance bonuses define the external face and the boardroom of the university. Making do with less defines the university where the humanities exist: for-

profit distance learning and the threat that MOOCs will replace foundation courses; breaking apart tenure-track jobs into ill-paid per course and online instruction that can be outsourced; the demise of language instruction; the creation of new full-time teaching employment through renewable contracts that carry high teaching loads; a privileged faculty elite that has access to tenure, research support and low teaching burdens; the recruiting of graduate students primarily as teaching labor; the centralization of curriculum and demands for outcomes-based assessment. There is no doubt that most of these changes have been either facilitated or made into options students can tolerate, through technology. But technology did not create these changes, and faculty members can resist by harnessing digital tools. They can adapt and change rather than refuse.

What if the things we know about digital humanities and all of the skills associated with it could be harnessed to create new kinds of intellectual workers that were in demand, not in excess? What if – we hacked the academy?

I would like to thank the cluster editors of this issue, Richard Ohmann and Ellen Schrecker, for their excellent questions, comments and editorial advice.

Notes

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