WHERE DOES EVIDENCE COME FROM?
DIGITAL ARCHIVE PROJECT

A) Purpose

In July 2015, I attended a National Endowment for the Humanities Institute on Digital Humanities at Community Colleges. In September, I attended an NEH workshop on Digital Humanities and Accessible Futures. These were very exciting opportunities for me think through some very big ideas.

Also, I am the Community-Based Learning (CBL) coordinator for the Southeast Campus. In that role, I promote a specific teaching approach that focuses on extending the lessons of a particular class by designing experiences that allow students to reflect upon what they learned by participating and volunteering in their communities. The idea here is that we learn best by doing and that we may not even recognize what we have learned until we reflect and explain it to another person.

The other key piece for WR 222 students is that this approach lets us think about how knowledge itself gets created. Where does academic evidence come from? Who creates it? Under what conditions?

B) Topic

For this assignment, I am asking you to spend two hours total getting set up and working on a digital archive crowd-source project. These tend to be set up for pure novices, easy to complete, and incredibly cool.

In many cases, these projects involve transcribing PDFs, so that the material can be searchable by scholars, accessible for people with disabilities, and useful for the public good.


You could transcribe documents related to an 1860 journey to Greenland. https://transcription.si.edu/project/8115

You could transcribe historical films about World War I, World War II, and “the newest exhibit at the National Archives in DC. Spirited Republic: Alcohol in American History” for the National Archives. http://www.archives.gov/citizen-archivist/subtitle-videos/


You could become the next Indiana Jones. (This one looks a little complex to me.) [http://crowdsourced.micropasts.org/](http://crowdsourced.micropasts.org/)

You could serve as a citizen cartographer. (This one also looks a little complex to me.) [http://buildinginspector.nypl.org/](http://buildinginspector.nypl.org/)

There are many projects you can choose. You can certainly pick something not on this list. My only request is that you spend two hours total getting a feel for how the project works.

C) **Tasks**

You will spend two hours setting up and participating in a crowd-sourcing project of your choosing. Then you will write me a report of 250 to 500 words reflecting upon your experience.

Please select a few CBL (Community-Based Learning) Questions and DH (Digital Humanities) Questions to answer in your report. I would like you to share what you have learned from this experience.

**CBL (Community-Based Learning) Questions**

- What service did you provide? For what groups?
- What did you learn about this historical period or scholarly field? Can you connect this content to any academic or personal experience?
- How was this experience different than listening to a lecture or reading a textbook?
- What was good, bad, and/or surprising?
- Would you do it again? Would you tell others to do it?
- What did you learn about yourself and the communities involved?

**DH (Digital Humanities) Questions**

- Who might use the data you created? How? Why?
- What does digital crowd-sourcing suggest about paid work? What are the deeper symbols of working for pay? What does our society value?
- Why do you think people do this work for free? What motivates them?
- What is this work unpaid? What might be different if this work were paid?
- What did you learn about yourself, scholarship, and our cultural ideas about work?
- Does this exercise impact how you view academic (vs. popular) sources?
- How is knowledge created?
- How can scholarship help people?
D) Rubric This new assignment is still an experiment. Please submit a thoughtful reflection using Standard Edited English. That is all I can expect at this stage.

Student Responses

The digital archives project is probably the most interesting assignment I have done all year.

This may be one of the most exciting school projects I've ever taken on.

I didn't know that these sort of projects even existed prior to this assignment, and I can easily say that this is one of the most interesting assignments I've ever done in a writing class.

After spending hours working on the project, I find that this is one of the most exciting school projects that I have ever taken.

I know that most of my classmates loved exploring these logs and thought it was neat just as I did.

Thank you very much for introducing me a new approach to the world’s knowledge. The experience was very exciting and useful for me. I will continue this activity even when it is not mandatory.

Projects like this restore my faith in humanity. I see projects like this and I wonder if there are any real boundaries on the possibilities of the human populace.