

*John Sutton Lutz*

Where can a history student go to learn the digital literacy skills of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and where can a history department go to see what others are doing? Here I highlight some of those places in Canada that offer such courses and suggest the range of approaches that are being taken.

Students seeking an introduction to, and advanced skills in, digital history have to look hard. Only a handful of history departments offer a few courses in digital history, while in other universities more generic digital humanities courses offer skills historians typically need. Interestingly, the history departments that have pioneered Digital History [Dighist] have tended to be those with a head start in Public History such as Concordia, Carleton, Sherbrooke and Western Ontario, while departments in the largest and oldest universities have not yet stepped into the digital stream.

Only two universities in Canada regularly offer more than a single course in digital history at either the grad or undergrad level. At the rest, the introductory courses serve more as an entree and students who wish for more end up learning as they go, either self-directed or in a kind of apprenticeship with historians working in the field. Only one Canadian university offers a full masters program in Digital Humanities.

### Learning and Teaching Dighist in Canada

At Brock two historians focus their research and teaching on the new media. Kevin Kee and John Bonnett are both Canada Research Chairs in Humanities Computing and in addition to active research profiles in this area they offer two undergraduate and a graduate course in digital humanities/history. Among the special interests of the faculty are gaming and 3-D reconstructions.

Concordia has one of the most diversified and largest concentration of digital historians in Canada and has a particular concentration in oral history on the web – or digital storytelling. The history department under, Elena Razlogova, co-director of the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling and director of its Digital History lab (<http://storytelling.concordia.ca>) offers digital history and public history courses with digital emphasis. Erica Lehrer, Canada Research Chair in Post-Conflict Memory, Ethnography & Museology, offers specialty courses involving digital representation including “Curating Difficult Knowledge” while Steve High, the other director of the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, offers courses involving the use of digital technology to record, and represent oral histories and storytellers.

Carleton University has a public history focus and Del Muike, recently retired, has been one of the leaders in Canada in using the web as a public history tool. Now James Opp has taken up the field and offers a course on “Digitizing History”. The department is currently conducting a job search in Digital Humanities and we can expect to see an expansion in their offerings in this area soon.

The University of Victoria is a newcomer to the teaching digital history despite being a pioneer in its production. Home of the Canadian Families Project and western node of the Canada Century Infrastructure Project, both designed to digitize public use samples of federal census, as well as the internet teaching site “Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History Project”. Dighist is offered as a joint graduate/undergraduate course focusing on databases and websites — the skills sets of its faculty, Eric Sager and John Lutz — but introduces the field generally. The department now offers a field in Digital History as a special topics Ph. D field. In the fall of 2009, the Humanities Faculty started an undergraduate introduction to Digital Humanities course examining the full range of skills and issues from scanning to copyright, which is projected to be the first in series of increasingly focused courses.

The University of Western Ontario is another institution that has used its Public History orientation as a springboard to leadership in digital history. There Alan MacEachern uses the undergraduate Public History course to introduce some elements of Digital History which are expanded and developed in a graduate course offered by William (Bill) Turkel. Turkel, who introduces his students to basic programming skills, also offers a course in interactive exhibit design while his colleague Don Spanner teaches a course in managing primary sources in the digital age. Several other public history graduate courses have dighist elements.

At l’Université de Sherbrooke, a longstanding interest in applied or public history has seen the development of the only compulsory undergraduate course in “information technology” in the country as well as a graduate course digital history under the direction of Léon Robichaud. Sherbrooke also offers a digital history option in its M.A. Programme.

### Learning and Teaching Digital Humanities in Canada

The University of Alberta leads the way when it comes to graduate training in the larger realm of digital humanities. Their Masters in Humanities Computing program has four core courses including a survey, a course on theoretical issues,

technical concepts and project design. One can do this MA with a specialization in History – like a double major. Optional courses allow students to focus on electronic texts, knowledge management, multimedia, research methods and the impact of the computer on culture, including a course on “Posthumanism”. The faculty include Peter Baskerville, Susan Brown, Lisa Given, Sean Gouglas, Harvey Quamen, Geoffrey Rockwell and Stan Ruecker.

While I may have missed some new programs (and if so please let me know at [jlutz@uvic.ca](mailto:jlutz@uvic.ca) clearly departments that offer

digital courses are a small fraction of the total. In most history departments, undergraduates students who want to go beyond basics have to pick up generic digital skills outside of their own departments, sometimes in New Media, Communications or Computer Science programs. Graduate students have even fewer choices if they want to stay in Canada. These are very early days in digital history education and small additions in departments around the country will have big impacts in the field.

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