

Title of case study

Developing digital fluency and critical thinking through digital humanities scholarship

Staff Lead

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School/ Department

School of Law and Social Justice / Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology

Faculty

Humanities and Social Sciences

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Name of course and module (if applicable) case study took place within

Criminology BA (Hons) / Sociology BA (Hons) / Social Policy BA (Hons)

SOCI 328: Panopticon and the People: Digital Approaches to the History of Crime and Punishment

Please briefly describe the activity undertaken for the case study

In this module, students examine how contemporary issues in crime and justice, including persistence and desistance, youth crime, female offending and gang crime, have been treated historically from the 18th century. Students work with online historical datasets including the [Digital Panopticon](#) (a research project based in the department), British Library 19th Century Newspapers Online, Old Bailey Online, Founders and Survivors, and London Lives. Using innovative digital techniques, students trace and evaluate the lives of offenders and reflect upon the extent to which they negotiated and challenged the punitive state. Students gain knowledge of historical methods and debates, engage with criminological perspectives and approaches, and gain transferrable digital skills.

How was the activity implemented?

The sessions are ran in 3 hour interactive seminars where the classroom 'becomes the archive' (Nicholson, 2005). Students locate an offender from the digital production resource and use complementary records e.g. British Library's 19th century newspapers online to learn more about them, such as their neighbourhood, family or their particular demographic. Students then situate the individual within the complexities of Victorian society and think about the extent to which they were victims of this state or perpetrators of crimes. I have designed this activity to incorporate historical as well as criminological techniques.

The two assessment tasks are:

- a short blog (1500 words) - written for the audience of the [Digital Panopticon](#) site, mainly for family historians across the UK and the globe, especially Australia, practising a different writing style, making use of multimedia and drawing on the data visualisation produced in the practicals.
- an essay (2500 words) - a short critical piece about the life of offenders selected situated within academic and critical debate;

Has this activity improved programme provision and student experience, if so how?

This module has only been running for a year with about 60 third-year sociology, social policy and criminology students. The module evaluation survey was overwhelmingly positive and the quality of student work was highly impressive. Students certainly liked the ability to research and get hands on with historical evidence, and using the Digital Panopticon and Old Bailey dissertation tools. But of primary importance and value to students seems to be the staff-student contact, i.e. lecturers' direct support and engagement in seminars and practicals.

Did you experience any challenges in implementation, if so how did you overcome these?

There were technical and environmental challenges including room allocations and technical malfunctions, but paper exercises were provided to attempt to circumnavigate these.

Which Liverpool University Hallmark(s) and Attribute(s) does this case study relate?

Research-connected Teaching	X
Active Learning	X
Authentic Assessment	X
Confidence	X
Digital Fluency	X
Global Citizenship	X

How does this case study relate to the Hallmarks and Attributes you have selected?

Quotes from module aims, learning outcomes or the module handbooks are used below to illustrate where these hallmarks are explicitly or implicitly articulated to students.

Research-connected Teaching

Module aims (excerpt): Encourage students to use and problematise a range of online research tools that facilitate the use of historical data to interrogate contemporary criminological debates and theories about crime and punishment.

Research-connected teaching involves both drawing on interdisciplinary research outputs and datasets in the field of crime history, as well as students learning about innovative research techniques which are at the cutting edge of digital humanities research, including computational linguistics, history, sociology, criminology, and data analytics.

Active Learning

The course emphasizes the acquisition of both historical methods and information technology skills through doing rather than just reading.
(Module handbook)

For this module the classroom becomes the archive, and students act as digital detectives, they get to explore the world of Victorian Crime and Punishment at the touch of a button. Students reconstruct individual offender lives, mapping out Victorian gang crimes such as [Peaky Blinders](#) and they use virtual reality to wander around Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon prison. The prison was never built, but was reconstructed by Nick Webb in Architecture and myself. The Panopticon has become the metaphor for 360 degree surveillance in modern societies. Theorist Michel Foucault's assumption that 360 degree surveillance was possible due to the all-seeing gaze of the gaoler which would result in 'docile bodies'. On the module, students use a Virtual Reality headset, and contest Foucault's theory whilst also reflecting upon the authority of historical material and digital reconstruction.

I use an interactive approach in the classroom. Lectures are interspersed with practical tasks. And while this incorporates inclusive learning, it is important that students have staff on hand to enable them to feel comfortable and confident to engage with hands-on research and digital techniques. It also de-centres the traditional lecture format and engages students to work between established research and the resources that can shape their own inquiry.

When students write their blogs, they become active producers of academic content and are able to critically reflect on their digital footprint.

Authentic Assessment

Normally, students produce assessments which are kept within the walls of the university. By writing publicly available blogs in their field, students can demonstrate their ability as researchers to communicate their findings to a wider audience which enables them to engage as active cultural citizens.

Confidence

Being able to engage with research projects based on their own critical inquiry and investigative skills gave students confidence in their own ideas and knowledge.

Digital Fluency

Excerpts from the module learning outcomes that are relevant to developing students' digital fluency include:

- Employ and interrogate online criminal history datasets and critically consider their advantages and limitations.
- Practice a range of quantitative and qualitative digital methodologies and visualisation techniques including corpus linguistics, mapping, and record linkage.
- Analyse and present research for online (blog) and offline platforms (essay).

Students are introduced to a range of quantitative and qualitative methodological techniques which are at the cutting edge of digital humanities research:

What went viral in the Victorian period by using frequency analysis on 19th Century Newspapers.

Excerpt from the module handbook:

- 'alongside the practical element of seminars, students will be asked to reflect on their readings and frame their digital work with debates about digital practices, crime history and criminology.'

Critical information literacy is also a key part in student learning, such as navigating the authority of information on the web, and this is covered within the module.

Global citizenship

The Digital Panopticon enables students to follow offenders' lives abroad, such as to Australia. Students also use global resources and datasets such as the Australian newspaper site, Trove.

In encouraging students to consider inequality within society, this case study addresses a number of aspects of global citizenship, including emphasis on belonging, social impact and justice.

How could this case study be transferred to other disciplines?

This case study could be of interest to anyone who has developed or is aware of existing datasets or digital resources which could help students carry out their own research tasks. The use of digital research methods such as data visualisation and other interdisciplinary techniques could also be applied in any disciplinary areas in which students undertake scholarship tasks. The use of blogging as an assessment tool is equally universally transferable. In addition, this case study could be further extended through collaboration.

If someone else were to implement the activity within your case study what advice would you give them?

- Engaging students in critical thinking and critical use of technology is as important as exposing students to digital tools.
- Seek out collaborations between humanities and STEM subjects.

Further links

Example of interdisciplinary collaboration: [Professor Dino Felluga's work](#) with Engineering and English Literature students in the USA. Paul Fyfe at the University of Georgia has done some incredibly inspiring digital pedagogy, and Programming Historian is a tremendously valuable resource and is pitched at all levels of access.



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