

Women in Christianity through Digital Humanities

Course Design Outline

Course Learning Objectives

Women in Christianity: Content Objectives

- Analyze primary and secondary sources to construct historically grounded interpretations of women's experiences, representations, and roles in Christian communities.
- Analyze how gender intersects with race, class, sexuality, geography, religious status, and other social locations in shaping Christian experience and historical interpretation.
- Evaluate questions of authority, privilege, power, and agency in the lives of Christian women and in the institutions, texts, practices, and traditions that have represented or regulated them.
- Develop evidence-based arguments that account for complexity, ambiguity, difference, and contested interpretation in the history of women in Christianity.

Digital Humanities Objectives

- Explain how digital humanities methods can support historical inquiry through spatial analysis, textual analysis, collection-building, visualization, and multimodal presentation.
- Think critically about computational approaches to complexity and nuance in human experience, including the interpretive choices involved in selection, classification, modeling, and representation.
- Design, build, and present an original digital humanities project that advances a clear argument through appropriately selected digital methods, historical evidence, scholarly sources, and media.
- Use digital sources and media responsibly by evaluating source quality, documenting provenance, observing copyright and fair-use principles, and providing appropriate attribution.

Core Digital Tools

- StoryMaps: multimodal historical argument, narrative structure, spatial presentation, and public-facing scholarship.
- Omeka: digital exhibits, curation, metadata, provenance, classification, and the interpretation of material and visual culture.
- Voyant: exploratory computational text analysis, visualization, distant reading, and movement between patterns and close reading.
- AntConc: corpus-based text analysis, concordances, collocations, frequency, keyword patterns, and comparison with Voyant's browser-based approach.
- Historical mapping/GIS: spatial thinking, historical geography, mobility, place, and the interpretive construction of spatial data.

Exemplars

- <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/7a61306ba28b40fb9171a40e951355c7>
- <https://xnherstory.omeka.net/>
- <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5a3bc6f4765c48b791508e9f37a9f348>

Final Digital Humanities Project

Students will create an original piece of digital humanities scholarship on a focused question related to women in Christianity. The project must advance a clear historical argument (in written prose), draw on and cite appropriate primary and secondary sources, and use one or more digital methods (such as StoryMaps, Omeka, Voyant, AntConc, or mapping/GIS) because the method contributes meaningfully to the inquiry or presentation. Students will also submit a brief methodological reflection explaining why they selected the method, how it shaped their interpretation, and what its limitations are.

Final Project Rubric

Each Criterion is scored as no evidence (55%), developing (70%), proficient (85%), or advanced (100%).

Criterion	What Successful Work Demonstrates
Substance: Argument and Evidence – 30 pts	The project advances a clear, historically grounded argument and supports it with relevant primary and secondary evidence.
Sophistication: Complexity and Nuance – 30 pts	The project grapples thoughtfully with complexity, ambiguity, difference, and historical context.
Style: Clarity and Precision – 20 pts	The project communicates its ideas clearly and precisely. Its organization, prose, visual elements, and digital structure work together to guide the audience through the argument.
Scholarly Practice: Sources and Citation – 20 pts	The project draws on reputable scholarly and primary sources and cites them appropriately. Images, maps, media, datasets, and other digital materials are attributed accurately and responsibly.

Course Requirements and Grades

Assignment	Weight
Class Participation and Written Reflections	15%
StoryMaps Lab	10%
Mapping / GIS Lab	10%
Omeka Lab	10%
Voyant / AntConc Text Analysis Lab	10%
Final Written In-Class Assessment on Content	5%
Final Digital Humanities Project	35%
Final Methodological Reflection	5%

Weekly Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction

Women in History, Christianity, and Digital Humanities

Content: Introduce the historical study of women in Christianity and establish recurring themes of gender, authority, power, agency, representation, and intersectionality.

Digital Humanities: Introduce digital humanities as a mode of humanities inquiry. Complete a collaborative mapping activity locating people, communities, institutions, and regions that will recur in the course.

Student Work: Short introductory reflection and orientation to course tools, source expectations, copyright, and citation.

Women, Leadership, and Authority in Early Christianity

Content: Study biblical and early Christian evidence concerning women as apostles, deacons, patrons, teachers, and leaders. Examine how historical authority is constructed from uneven evidence.

Digital Humanities: Introduce StoryMaps. Practice organizing a digital argument, selecting reputable sources and images, and providing attribution and bibliography.

Student Work: Short StoryMaps exercise on an early Christian woman or community.

Week 2: Gender and Voice

Martyrdom, Perpetua and Felicity

Content: Read and analyze the Passion of Perpetua and Felicity with attention to authorship, family, embodiment, authority, and the construction of martyr identity.

Digital Humanities: StoryMaps Lab 1: use narrative sequence, images, headings, and cited evidence to make a historical argument in a multimodal format.

Student Work: Work on StoryMaps Lab 1.

Asceticism, the Desert Mothers, and Macrina

Content: Examine women's ascetic practice, sayings, hagiography, spiritual authority, and the relationship between marginality and influence.

Digital Humanities: Evaluate how digital presentation shapes interpretation, especially when evidence is fragmentary, mediated, or retrospective.

Student Work: StoryMaps Lab 1 due; short method reflection.

Week 3: Power, Privilege, and Place

Pilgrimage, Liturgical Practice, and Egeria

Content: Study Egeria's pilgrimage and liturgical observations with attention to mobility, sacred space, and physical performance of religious practice, and access.

Digital Humanities: Introduce historical mapping/GIS. Translate textual evidence into spatial data and evaluate the interpretive choices involved in identifying and plotting historical locations.

Student Work: Begin Mapping/GIS Lab 2 on Egeria.

Intersectionality and Empress Theodora

Content: Study Empress Theodora's treatment as a woman of power, privilege, and also vulnerability to exploitation. Read "Slut-Shaming an Empress" by Betancourt

Digital Humanities: Continue historical mapping/GIS. Translate textual evidence into spatial data and evaluate the interpretive choices involved in identifying and plotting historical locations.

Student Work: Work on Mapping/GIS Lab 2 on Egeria.

Week 6: Institutions and Movements

Women in Christianity, 500–1200

Content: Examine figures such as Hilda of Whitby, Leoba, and Hildegard of Bingen in relation to monastic institutions, learning, patronage, correspondence, and ecclesial authority.

Digital Humanities: Use mapping to think about institutions, mobility, correspondence, and networks; discuss the difference between mapped data and lived historical relationships.

Student Work: Mapping/GIS Lab 2 due; short method reflection.

Women in Christianity, 1200–1500

Content: Consider motivations, agency, and restraints for women in new movements, include the Crusades, and forms of religious life with attention to status, authority, and agency. Read Anna Komnene's *The Alexiad*, "Crusader on the Imperial Throne" anecdote from Book X.

Digital Humanities: Introduce Omeka as a platform for digital curation. Learn item records, Dublin Core metadata, provenance, image rights, and exhibit structure.

Student Work: Begin Omeka Lab 3 on a set of objects, manuscripts, images, or communities.

Week 7: Materiality and Mysticism

Suffering and Saving Bodies

Content: Examine women's authorship and the mediation of women's voices through scribes, confessors, hagiographers, editors, and translators: Beatrijs of Nazareth treatise and life, Mary of Oignies, Marguerite Porete, and St. Francis. Analyze gendered bodies, ascetic practice, material devotion, visual culture, and the interpretation of women's religious experience.

Digital Humanities: Use Omeka to examine how classification and metadata shape the meaning of objects. Discuss what is gained and lost when complex historical materials are reduced to standardized fields.

Student Work: Omeka Lab 3 due; short method reflection.

Mystical and Visionary Authors

Content: Study selections from Julian of Norwich with attention to language, theology, authority, embodiment, and textual transmission.

Digital Humanities: Introduce computational text analysis through Voyant. Explore frequency, trends, contexts, and links, and use distant-reading patterns to generate questions for close reading.

Student Work: Begin Text Analysis Lab 4 with a common corpus.

Week 8: Reformation and Confessional Change

Content Day

Content: Examine women as reformers, patrons, writers, religious, wives, rulers, and dissenters during the Reformations, such as Katharina Schutz Zell, Argula von Grumbach, and Teresa of Avila. Analyze how confessional change altered opportunities and constraints.

Digital Humanities: Apply critical approaches to data and representation. Examine who is visible in archives, whose categories structure the data, and how digital projects can reproduce or challenge historical asymmetries of power.

Student Work: Lab 4 due (Text Analysis using Voyant and/or AntConc); short method reflection.

Project Day

Content: Identify topics for final projects.

Digital Humanities: Connect research questions to research design/methods.

Student Work: Begin final project proposal: research question, preliminary argument, sources, digital method, and project plan.

Week 9: Race, Empire, Mission, and Global Christianity

Content Day

Content: Examine women's participation in missions, colonialism, conversion, education, resistance, and global Christian networks, with explicit attention to race, empire, class, and intersectionality. Read excerpt from Juana Inés de la Cruz.

Digital Humanities: Troubleshooting/Workshop time.

Student Work: Submit proposal for final project.

Project Day

Content: Workshop multimodal argumentation: relationship among prose, data, images, maps, exhibits, and visualizations. Emphasize accessibility, clarity, precision, and evidence.

Digital Humanities: Students identify which digital method best answers their own historical question and justify that methodological choice.

Student Work: Final project source set and annotated bibliography due; in-class project workshop.

Week 10: Women, Reform, Activism, and Public Religious Authority

Content Day

Content: Study women's religious leadership in modern Christianity through reform, abolition, social movements, preaching, education, theology, and activism. Read the Reverend Dr. Pauli Murray.

Project Day

Student Work: Final project prototype or partial build due; peer review.

Digital Humanities: peer review.

Week 11: Contemporary Christianity: Gender, Sexuality, and Authority**Content Day:**

Content: Examine contemporary debates over ministry, leadership, sexuality, family, embodiment, and authority across diverse Christian communities. Read excerpt from *Biblical Womanhood*.

Digital Humanities: Critically assess the ethics of digital representation, public scholarship, audience, privacy, bias, and the limits of quantifying or visualizing lived religious experience.

Student Work: Revise final project based on peer and instructor feedback.

Project Day: Work on Final Projects

Week 12: Digital Scholarship Workshop and Synthesis

Project Day: Work on Final Projects

Content Day:

Content: Synthesize recurring course themes: intersectionality; authority, privilege, power, and agency; historical change; representation; and the relationship between lived experience and institutional structures.

Assessment: Written in-class assessment on content.

Final Week: Final Digital Humanities Projects

Content: Present and discuss original research on women in Christianity.

Digital Humanities: Evaluate how digital methods shaped the research questions, evidence, argument, interpretation, and public presentation of the project.

Student Work: Final digital humanities project and reflective methodological statement due.