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DH in Prison

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DH IN PRISON

by

SABINA PRINGLE

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Digital Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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ABSTRACT

DH in Prison

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Sabina Pringle

Advisor: Matthew K. Gold

With the aim of extending academic opportunities to system-impacted students, **DH in Prison** is a capstone and thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Digital Humanities, The City University of New York. DH in Prison discusses the need for including digital humanities courses in college-in-prison programs and outlines how minimal computing methods can be used to offer incarcerated students an introductory digital humanities course and teach them the necessary technical skills. Its sibling site **Intro to DH** is a proof of concept for the course itself.

So far, there have been only a few digital humanities projects in prisons in the U.S.. This is partly because restrictions on the use of electronic devices make digital resources mostly unavailable to incarcerated students. In view of these existing restrictions, the course envisioned here relies on minimal computing solutions to work under a wide range of prison-specific constraints including hardware, software, connectivity, and the probability that some incarcerated students may not have all the technical skills they will need to take an undergraduate digital humanities course.

The course model included in this project adapts a series of tutorials developed by the Graduate Center Digital Fellows for the Graduate Center Digital Initiatives (GCDI) Digital Humanities Research Institute (GC DHRI), which cover basic technical skills students will need. The model course is designed to be housed on a static site and delivered in a regular classroom equipped with seventeen laptops connected

by a local area network. No internet connection is needed. Students will use the laptops to explore the field of digital humanities and engage in DH praxis as they gain expertise in technical skills as well as tools and methods for humanities research. The dual purposes of this pedagogical initiative are, on one hand, to provide students with tools to engage in humanities scholarship and, on the other hand, to learn digital skills which will help them find employment upon release. The technical part of the course covers the command line, version control, HTML and CSS, Jekyll (Ruby) and Python.

The solutions sought in this capstone/thesis are influenced and inspired by conversations, praxis and ideas that grew out of the field of minimal computing. As such, the envisioned Intro to DH in prison aims to fulfill student needs at minimal cost, keeping in mind monetary cost, cost in labor, learning curves, environmental impact, and independence. A case study and possible proposal to teach this course in the John Jay College of Criminal Justice Prison-to-College Pipeline program at Otisville Correctional Facility is included in chapter five.

DH in Prison is published at https://binipringle.github.io/dh-in-prison/ and its GitHub repository is at https://github.com/binipringle/dh-in-prison. Its sibling site, Intro to DH, is published at https://binipringle.github.io/intro-to-dh/ and its GitHub repository is at https://github.com/binipringle/intro-to-dh.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like many digital humanities projects, **DH in Prison/Intro to DH** is built upon and informed by community work. I am strongly indebted to the CUNY Graduate Center Digital Humanities Program for providing a real community and for facilitating many formal and informal gatherings, workshops, academic events and conversations that informed and nourished my work.

I am deeply grateful to my thesis advisor Matthew K. Gold who inspired me, encouraged me, helped me sharpen, develop and scope my ideas, bore with me and supported me along the way. I am also deeply grateful to Patrick Smyth for his encouragement and support (Patrick told me back in 2018 that this project "has legs," which, coming from Patrick, meant a great deal to me) and for kindling in me, through his awesome pedagogy, a real love for coding and exploring the affordances of digital tools for doing meaningful humanities work.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the GC Digital Fellows who welcomed me weekly in their office hours, helped me when I got stuck, taught me in their workshops and always generously shared their expertise. Particular thanks to Javier Otero Peña, Olivia Ildefonso, Filipa Calado and Rafael Davis Portelo. I want to thank Lisa Marie Rhody for her encouragement and advice and for organizing the GC DHRI, which is a model that guides this project in many ways. I am grateful to Alex Gil, Marii Nyröp and the Global Outlook::Digital Humanities for their work and conversations which inspired, informed and guided mine, and specifically to Alex for the Ed. Jekyll theme and for its excellent documentation.

I also want to extend my sincere thanks to my fellow student and friend Carolyn McDonough, who listened to me, gave me lots of ideas, supported me and shared much-needed comic relief in our conversations about a fictitious "valve therapy" treatment to decompress when the rigors of academic work required a break. I want to thank Irma Ostroff and Lance Jay Brown for looking at endless iterations of this project, sharing my enthusiasm, and encouraging and listening to me. Sincere thanks to Carla Cappetti, Joshua Wilner and Barbara Gleason for teaching me a lot of what went into this thesis, and to Ilian David Sanchez Rodriguez and Gisella Lopez Bautista for their support and for jumping in with their awesome

artwork. I am grateful to Olga Dais for her continued support and encouragement, and to Lisa Hochstadt for her ongoing encouragement and support and for helping me prepare my lightning talk.

Last but not least, I want to thank the students I tutor at Metropolitan Detention Center Brooklyn for helping me manifest my concept, and to understand some of the things that they would need to help them learn if a **DH in Prison/Intro to DH** or similar course were made available to them.

DIGITAL MANIFEST

I. Abstract (PDF)

II. Acknowledgments (PDF)

III. WARC files

a. Project website 1 (“DH in Prison”)
Archived version of https://binipringle.github.io/dh-in-prison/

b. Project website 2 (“Intro to DH”)
Archived version of https://binipringle.github.io/intro-to-dh/

IV. Code and other deliverables

a. Zip file containing the contents of the GitHub repository of website 1 at the time of deposit (https://github.com/binipringle/dh-in-prison)

b. Zip file containing the contents of the GitHub repository of website 1 at the time of deposit (https://github.com/binipringle/intro-to-dh)

GLOSSARY OF FUNCTIONS

bash ~/Downloads/Anaconda3-2020.02-Linux-x86_64.sh	tells your computer to install Python 3.7 using the Anaconda Python 3.7 installer
bundle exec jekyll serve	builds and serves the static site locally if you are running multiple Ruby environments using bundler
bundle install	fetches all remote sources, resolves dependencies and installs all needed gems
bundle update	updates the consistent environment for Ruby projects by tracking, installing, deleting and replacing the exact gems and versions that are needed
code -v	tells you what version of Visual Studio Code is installed on your computer
gem install bundler	provides a consistent environment for Ruby projects by tracking and installing the exact gems and versions that are needed
git --version	tells you what version of Git is installed on your computer
jekyll -v	tells you what version of Jekyll is installed on your computer
jekyll build	builds a _site folder
jekyll serve	builds and serves the static site locally
python --version	tells you what version of Python is installed on your computer
ruby -v	tells you what version of Ruby is installed on your computer
rvm –version	check to see if your computer has Ruby Version Manager installed; if it doesn't, see RVM documentation at https://rvm.io/rvm/install to install RVM
rvm gemset create ed	creates the set of ruby gems that build the Jekyll site
rvm gemset use ed	tells your computer to use the ed Jekyll theme
sha256sum /file/path	tells your computer to open the Python 3.7 installer and install Python 3.7
sudo apt update	updates package management tools
sudo apt update	installs Git
sudo apt-get install libgl1-mesa-glx libegl1-mesa libxrandr2 libxrandr2 libxss1 libxcursor1 libxcomposite1 libasound2 libxi6 libxtst6	installs the extended dependencies for Qt (this is for using Anaconda to install Python 3.7 for Linux)
sudo apt-get install ruby-full	tells your computer to install Ruby

A NOTE ON TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

The model course Intro to DH (https://binipringle.github.io/intro-to-dh/) is designed to be used on computers connected to each other via a Local Area Network (LAN) and without an internet connection. One of these computers would function as the local server. The other computers would be connected to the local server by means of a router and a network switch (the network switch would expand the number of ports on the router). Alternatively, they could be hardwired to the network switch. In this case no router would be needed.

I chose to work with Linux because Linux it is free and open source. The technical skills sessions on Intro to DH and the documentation on DH in Prison (https://binipringle.github.io/dh-in-prison/) and Intro to DH are written for Linux. I do not provide instructions for performing operations on Mac OS or Windows.

The technical skills sessions cover the command line (or terminal, bash), Git, HTML and CSS, Jekyll and Python. For these sessions, computers need Ruby, Jekyll and Python. The documentation on Intro to DH provides resources for replacing non-Linux operating systems with Ubuntu (Linux) as well as instructions for installing or updating Git, Ruby and Visual Studio Code, and for installing Jekyll and Python.