Course Background

Here is the course description and its purpose as I explained to the students on the syllabus:

This is an experimental class that considers the intersection of eighteenth-century poetry and the increasingly significant methods of computer assisted textual-analysis. In this course we will be doing two things simultaneously. First, we will be mapping out eighteenth-century literary history through its poetry. This will include close reading poems and developing a picture of the Enlightenment by exploring the intellectual, historical, and cultural context of this body of poetry. This will more or less feel like the familiar work of literary studies. Secondly, we will both develop and use the skills of computer assisted text-analysis. Here we will be both testing the narratives of literary history and asking new interpretive questions as well as reflecting on the methodology. Does data visualization ramify interpretive questions? Does Franco Moretti’s “distance reading” enrich, challenge, or both our traditional reading skills and interpretive narratives? This portion of the class may or may not feel as familiar, but my gamble is that it will be exciting and hopefully revelatory for you as students of literary studies.

The English 373 course is an upper-level course designed to give students a more intensive and focused experience with British literature of the eighteenth century. I designed this course to bring into alignment literary history and some of the newer methods of literary studies.

Learning Outcomes

These are the department “Learning Outcomes” for English 373:

- Read critically and analyze literature of Britain’s Restoration period and eighteenth century (1660 to 1789).
- Accurately characterize the historical issues and genres of the Restoration period and eighteenth century.
- Form a research strategy, independently locate relevant digital and print sources, and draw upon these to develop an effective written argument pertinent to the material studied in the class. Produce polished, competent, formal writing, free from distracting errors in mechanics, syntax, and formatting, and in accordance with MLA formatting and citation guidelines.

In addition to the department outcomes I added a few specific to this iteration of 373:

- Develop facility with computer-assisted text analysis and a number of prepackaged and free text analysis software tools
- Think critically about the discipline of literary study and its various methodological approaches
- Maintain a research journal that chronicles successes and failures throughout the semester and documents what work actually been done. This teaches students to be consistent project managers by maintaining a running record
of what has been done, what the results of experiments were, and what directions are still projected as possibly productive research goals.

The reason I think my learning outcomes are representative of what is important to accomplishing the larger program learning outcomes is that each and every one clarifies a specific process and its value in relation to the English department program objectives. For instance, one aim of the English department is to think critically. This program objective shows up twice in my learning outcomes, first as students reflect on the eighteenth-century literature, and second as they reflect on the methodology that is often left as a given process that needs no examination.

Course Activities and Assessments of Student Learning

Field Notes
The “field notes” are simply a way to introduce authors and their historical/literary contexts at the opening of each new theme. This should include:

- biographical information
- significance in the literary history of the eighteenth century

The group should divide up this work and correlate it before posting it to the blog on the field notes page.

Reading Journal
The purpose here is to demonstrate active reading and intellectual engagement with the material. This will take two forms:

- An actual journal of summary, paraphrase and formal features for each poem we read. This can be in either electronic or paper format. In either case bring the journal to class for periodic review and so that you can enrich your own engagement with the poems through classroom discussions
- Showing me your books with evidence of active reading—highlighting, underlining, notes, etc.

Visualization Exercise
Due: Wednesday, Jan 22 at 11:59 pm
Use one of the visualization tools from TAPoR and do a visualization of a poem. Use a journal to mark out your steps and detail the choices you make. This will allow you to refine the questions text analysis might offer as well as allow you to repeat results.

- Choose a poem from the “Music” theme and prepare the text as a plain text file
- Ask yourself interpretive questions that you think the text analysis tools might be useful in answering
- Use at least two different visualizations and make sure you either export, save or use screen captures to preserve the results
- Write a 500 word analysis of the poem based on the visualization.
- Post visualization and analysis to the Visualization page of the blog

Reflection Paper
Due: Monday, Jan 27 at 11:59 pm
This 500 word paper is meant to serve as a space for reflection on what, if any, new hermeneutical questions algorithmic criticism and the data visualization process evokes.

**Group Presentation**
This second assignment is meant to take the skills developed and the methodological experience from the first visualization exercise and apply to a larger set of poems with greater interpretive flexibility. Make sure the group keeps a research journal on the blog. Remember that your audience will be me and our class, but also several interested faculty and students.

- Construct a set of questions and hypotheses about a small collection of poems that grows out of your group’s theme. (Do this after your read the poems, but before you touch the computer so that you can search for tools that will best address your particular questions.) This should include some preliminary research to canvas the critical field that engages your poems, authors, or theme.
- Build a small corpus of plain text files (one for each poem). This means transcribing the poems (either by hand or using an online version that matches the poem from the Fairer and Gerrard anthology) and saving them as plain text files.
- Select tools from TAPor or one of the other sites that you think might lead to interesting results or open doors to new interpretive questions.
- Using one, several or all of the poems in your corpus (I suggest doing all of this approaches) run them through the text-analysis tools.
- As a group decide what tools/visualizations produced the most procative results–new interpretive questions, challenges to standard critical narratives, confirmation of accepted narratives, or any new insights you think might be interesting. This last might include your own thesis as a group that emerged from the process.
- Present your findings to the class in a 15 min presentation followed by a vigorous Q & A session.

**Final Paper/Project**
Due: Monday, Apr 21 at 11:59 pm
Using the corpus we’ve built over the course of the semester, apply computer assisted text-analysis to a clearly articulated research question. As a word of methodological warning: make hypotheses and test several possibilities before settling down to articulate that question. Start broad and work through the data to come to a clearer sense of what questions might be possible from a data set that spans the whole of what we’ve explored of 18thC poetry. Then write a 10-12 page paper that consists of three parts:

- 2-3 page explanation of why you choose the hermeneutical questions you did and why you choose the tools you did to explore those questions.
- 5-7 page analysis
- Appendix including all relevant visualizations

Proposed paper sections:
Methodology
• Conceptual framework (in this case some form of macroanalysis drawn from Jockers, Ramsey, Rockwell, or anyone else you’ve picked up along the way)
• Specific approach (the tools and methods you’ve been using and why)
• Articulation of the problem you wish to address and your proposed response/thesis (this should be very brief and very clear)

Review of Lit . . . sort of
• This is where you set out the specific issue in eighteenth-century poetry you wish to engage and the framework in which you are going to work. Something like the critical narrative to which you are contributing/challenging/ etc.
• A full articulation of the thesis. This should take a paragraph or so and include the implications for your thesis.

Body
• The rubber hits the road here. What evidence are you marshaling, how are you constructing the argument so that it flows from idea to idea, and how the ideas stack up with each other to make for a clear and coherent case for you interpretive stance.
• Although you don’t place the visualizations here this where you are interpreting them as they relate to your thesis about eighteenth-century poetry.

Conclusion
• What are the conclusions you draw from your data analysis and what are the implications of those conclusions for literary history?

Appendix
• Place all your figures here and make sure they are labeled clearly so that when you reference them in the body of the paper I can come and see what you are pointing at.

Works Cited
• You know the drill here. Format according to MLA conventions

Student Achievement of Learning Outcomes
As evidence that students have achieved the course learning objectives one need to examine the work produced. I had no student who took the course and failed which suggests that the assignment and assessments were complimentary and aligned. I asked students to learn difficult critical and technical skills and demonstrate those skills in a written paper and project, all of which either meet or exceeded my expectations.

Plans for Improvement
Looking back I really asked a lot of the students and while some grew frustrated, tired, or simply rebelled (I told them on the first day it was an experimental class that would be exhausting but some didn’t hear) for the most part they worked hard and delivered well beyond what I would have otherwise expected. The feedback has been pretty much as expected with a number of students really enjoying the challenge and opportunity to do something new and others finding it really difficult.
My instructor rating was about average 7.2, but the course rating was very low for me at 6.0—a function of 18 students rating good or above and one student who really hated the class giving it a 1.0. Taking into account the feedback and my own reflection on the class I’ve retooled by:

1. Spending more time in the beginning of the class to develop understanding and practical usage of digital tools.
2. Pare down the reading so as to sharpen focus on the set of literary reading skills and aspects of literary history that are most germane to the eighteenth century.
Citizenship Project Final Report

My citizenship report turns on two points: (1) working to improve English 291 as course coordinator and (2) continuing to develop as a contributing member of the English department. As course coordinator I’ve tried to fulfill all the duties and expectations associated with that stewardship. I have attended classes taught by Miranda Wilcox and Jason Kerr, collected numerous syllabi and assignments, read student evaluations for all the 291 instructors, communicated with the other instructors about the class via email and in informal meetings in the halls and during office hours, and reported to Leslie on my sense of the overall health of 291. In addition to the regular expectations last spring I attended the camp assessealot at Daniels Summit to help draft a new statement on writing in the literary history survey courses and revise the course documents as they relate to the place of the 290’s in the literary history series. In all of this I have been struck by the quality of work and the diversity of opinions regarding the 290’s and 291 in particular. As I planned this year has been an information-gathering year and I feel that at this point I have a handle on how the class is performing, both in terms of its strengths and weakness.

In terms of the latter, I received what I feel has been very good advice when I was first hired: be a careful observer of how the department works and where I can best contribute. In attending department meetings and reading hiring/promotion files I’ve been very careful to listen and glean what constitutes a contributing comment vs. a distraction, what expectations are and that they are very nuanced—both objective and subjective. When I have found the need to open my mouth, I often find myself knocking on peoples doors to ask procedural questions as well as what their working on or if they’d be willing to work on an idea with me. In short, I’ve tried to spend this first year learning how to be a good departmental citizen and contribute when I felt like I could. It has been and education and I think one that will serve me well in the future as I begin to stick my neck out by continuing to listen and learn, but also open my mouth in hopefully helpful ways.
Scholarship Strategies Final Report

My goals were to complete an essay with Matt Wickman, finish the technical/editorial work on the “Wordsworth Guide” edition, revise and submit an essay on William Collins, begin work on an essay on eighteenth-century lyric, and build a digital humanities project out of an ORCA funded grant to design, build, and populate a database of eighteenth-century poetry. While many of the projects are multiyear endeavors and there is of course more work still to be done, in the main those goals have been met and in some respects exceeded.

Eighteenth-Century and Poetics Scholarship
In October of 2014 I submitted my essay on William Collins and eighteenth-century poetics to The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation. The essay argues that William Collins’s poetry is best understood from the vantage of "aesthetic techné" rather than a "preromantic" or "age of sensibility" framework. This alternative perspective sees Collins's poetic experiments located in the context of Enlightenment technics rather than the ethereal realms of romantic genius. That is, Collins’s work illuminates the history of new media poetics in the world of technics as well as the technicity of eighteenth-century poetry so often seen as the work of madmen and frustrated genius. It is now through initial editorial review and currently out with readers.

“Of Tone and Techne,” the essay I am co-authoring with Matt, is in the final stages of drafting and will be ready to go to a journal (we’ve discussed several from Poetics Today to New Literary History) very soon. The year has been a frustrating and fruitful year for this essay as I’ve been pushed to my limits as a writer and thinker. Nearly all the drafting has taken place this year and a great deal of research has been added as this essay’s direction has wandered in many exciting conceptual and poetical directions. (As the project is not yet complete I describe this essay in the 2015 scholarship goals section.)

My initial work on an essay on eighteenth-century lyric form has developed into a macroanalysis of various stylistic features of early to mid eighteenth-century poem. I was invited by Nick Mason to present a preliminary version of the essay and website titled “The Lyric Poetry Project” to the Wasatch Romantic and Eighteenth-Century Studies Symposium in October 2014. The essay and website set out the methods and procedures I use to gather and prepare texts for computational processing, as well as set out the preliminary findings that resulted from topic modeling and data visualization. I describe the next phase of this two-part project in the 2015 scholarship goals.

Digital Humanities Scholarship
In addition to “The Lyric Poetry Project”, which is a blend of traditional and digital approaches to literary scholarship, I have two additional digital humanities projects. The first is the critical edition of Wordsworth’s “Guide” with Nick Mason and Paul
Westover. This project has been accepted at Romantic Circles and is in the final stages of production for the web.

The second DH project is the “18thC Poetry Themes and Genres” database, originally funded by an ORCA grant, has now completed its first iteration. I used the Text Creation Partnership (TCP) to collate a pool of over 2100 text including essay collection and anthologies of poetry. The TCP allows for the download of the xml versions of the transcriptions which allowed me to narrow the dataset to just over 2000 poems—more than half have now been tagged and cataloged with publication information, title, author, venue, first and last line, plain text versions of every poem, as well as theme and genre. I then designed and coded up an HTML interface and with the help of Jeremy Brown linked this interface to a relational database coded in php. This was a truly collaborative project that included the work of Jarom McDonald and Jeremy Browne from the Office of Digital Humanities as well as the heroic work of the ORCA recipient Brittany Strobelt and assistance from Kylan Rice (for the first part of 2014) in tagging the poems. but the database is now ready to begin the next phase with is data mining and report generation. Supervising this project has been an eye-opening experience on a number of levels and has truly invigorated me for the continuation of this project as well as its linkage to other digital humanities projects.

The final piece of scholarly work I’d like to highlight here could just as easily be included in a “professional development” section, but given that I’ve used the skills and knowledge gained at the 2014 Digital Humanities Summer Institute on the both the “The Lyric Poetry Project” and the “18thC Poetry Themes and Genres” I thought it best to include it here. I attended the “Data Mining for Digital Humanists” at the 2014 Digital Humanities Summer Institute (DHSI) in Victoria BC. There I took part in a five-day intensive seminar on statistics and computer programming focused on how to understand the math that works beneath the hood of statistical software applications as well as how to apply statistical software packages and programming to text mining in the digital humanities. Again, the outcomes of the DHSI seminar have proved essential in the development of two of my three digital humanities projects.