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Undergraduate Archival Research in Early Modern Studies: Digital Possibilities for Small Colleges and Universities

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Those of us who teach at predominantly undergraduate institutions with large teaching loads and small research budgets often believe that substantial archival projects are outside the realm of possibility in our situations. However, the explosion in the number of Digital Humanities tools available in recent years, along with improved collaborative technologies, have significantly changed the landscape of archival research. What we present here is an undergraduate research project designed to function in a small college or university with limited resources. To that end, we are working to establish a project in textual editing and publication at our two schools, with possible participation from a third. All three universities are of similar size and with similar resource limitations, so the project functions as a means of integrating yet another layer of student collaboration and as a function of pooling resources. Therefore, we believe that it is possible for small universities to undertake these kinds of scholarly endeavors through a combination of both interdepartmental and inter-collegiate

collaboration, aided by a range of widely available technological tools. Emily Christina Murphy and Shannon R. Smith thoughtfully examine the disparity of access to digital humanities tools and projects, as well as the philosophical divide between digital humanities as utilitarian and career-building versus digital humanities as developing what they call citizen-scholars.^[1] We find that our work at small universities with tight budgets sits at the intersection of these tensions financial and philosophical distinctions. Within the context of such discussions about the use of digital tools at smaller institutions, we highlight the ways in which collaboration between institutions can heighten and enrich the experiences of students by pooling resources to take on larger, more in-depth projects.

In our field, collaboration is the exception not the norm, and as such, few established models for cooperative work exist. Claire Battershill et al. have discussed the ways in which the academic monograph has conditioned our approach to any research project, limiting our perceived options. However, as they pushed against these boundaries and worked collaboratively to create the Modernist Archives Publishing Project (MAPP), they realized that the real strength of their endeavor was the collaborative aspect itself, especially “the network of *actual* humans it has brought together under the auspices of a digital project.”^[2] Our goal is to bring this collaborative scholarly ethos to bear on the ways that we have already cooperated in our teaching to involve our students in a network of discovery.^[3] As two teachers who have often collaborated across our two universities designing courses and curriculum, we frequently use our classrooms to compare pedagogies and try out new ideas. Since we are the sole teachers of early modern studies in our respective departments, we often seek out collegial feedback from each other that our small departments cannot provide locally in our specialty. We had been discussing the possibility of involving undergraduate students in textual editing, so in the fall 2018 semester we decided undertake a small test of the students’ aptitude and interest. Dr. Harries was teaching the class with the most appropriate subject matter, which was his department’s “History of the English Language” course. Within the context of the unit on early modern English, he gave students the opportunity to participate in the EMROC (Early Modern Recipe Online Collective) Transcribathon, which was working with Jane Dawson’s Recipe Book (Folger V.b.14) from the early seventeenth century.^[4] The assignment was optional, allowing students to use it to replace one of their bi-weekly unit quiz grades. The students were somewhat dubious at first but intrigued enough to participate. We devoted the first 20 minutes of class to a crash course in semi-diplomatic transcription and the basic functions of the Folger Library’s Dromio transcription software.^[5] Then we chose a recipe as a class and worked through the first 10 lines on the projector screen at the front of the classroom. At that point, students were given the option to work with a partner, choose a recipe, and use the remaining class time to produce a transcription to contribute to the project.

What surprised us most was the level of enthusiasm the students exhibited. Ultimately, every active member of the class chose to do the assignment. Dr. Harries spent the next hour literally running from one group to the next, where each was excited about the puzzles they were finding and asking advice on how to approach them. That day, and in a follow-up

discussion in the next class period, students attributed their motivation to three main things. First of all, as English majors, they simply found the challenge of untangling the language and handwriting to be a fun exercise. Secondly, however, they found it rewarding to be looking at something raw—a real artifact that had not been edited or prepared as an exercise. Their third reason built on this: they liked knowing that their work was actually contributing to a real, scholarly project. The copies of the transcriptions they turned in showed remarkably good results, as well.

We find this initial experience encouraging, and it is guiding our thinking about how we might approach a larger scale project. Certainly, the collaborative environment of the classroom contributed to the success of the small assignment, but it seems that the stakes and urgency of the work really gave a sense of purpose to what the students were learning. The assignment gave them the opportunity to try an activity they enjoyed for its own sake but then allowed it to have a larger impact.

Collaboration on a larger scale presents us with additional key opportunities. In finessing the definitions of “collaborative” versus “social” cooperation in digital humanities projects, Peter Robinson examines some of the assumptions and expectations in producing digital scholarly editions. As a starting place, he posits that much digital work is inherently collaborative because large projects require a variety of individuals with a variety of specialties to succeed. In short, he says, “The implication is clear: the way forward is working together in groups,” because such projects provide “an efficient space for a team of people to work together, which defines goals and adequate resources.”^[6] The challenge for those of us at small schools remains this very question of adequate resources. Building on this model for professional scholars to create a working project space and pool available resources, we plan to apply this to the specific realm of undergraduate research, where new and increasingly available free-access tools like the EMROC project provide students with experiences they would not have otherwise. The ultimate goal of the project, then, is to create a cooperative endeavor that will involve a large undergraduate research component at all participating universities that trains students in early modern transcription and generates the urgency of the EMROC Transcribathon experience by producing open-source, digital, scholarly editions of little known early modern dramatic texts, along with ancillary documents that situate them within sixteenth- and seventeenth-century understandings of historiography and confessional positions.

Students will assist in the accessing, transcribing, and editing of a discrete set of texts in both printed and manuscript format. In preparation for such work, undergraduate students need an introduction to textual studies, transcription, and editing in a structured environment. The EMROC digital collections and Transcribathon events provide an opportunity for students to work with primary documents and contribute to a real scholarly project as an introduction to this kind of work. Having begun by embedding these activities into existing courses on early modern language and literature (with positive results of student engagement), our continued

work involves creating a Textual Studies and Editing class that can be taught at each participating school.

We hope that sharing this project inspires other faculty at relatively small, under-resourced colleges and universities to consider ways to integrate student engagement with archival early modern texts into their courses and curriculum, despite challenges to access of costly digital archives. Further, we hope to establish ways small colleges and universities can work together to share students and resources as a means of enriching student learning and offering students an avenue to producing substantial and necessary scholarly work beyond the classroom, beyond the critical literary analysis paper, and even beyond the undergraduate conference.

Collaborative Undergraduate Research Project

Undergraduate research goals and tasks:

At Concordia University Wisconsin and Missouri Western State University undergraduate research projects primarily take place in the summer. Thus, this represents the goals of a single summer with a minimum of two undergraduate researchers, one from each university, for the first run at this project. Students will have already completed the paleography and transcription course developed for this project. In order to track our own progress and coordinate at both institutions, we have established some concrete student expectations for the project. The “goals” listed below are roughly equivalent to student learning outcomes, detailing skills the students will gain through their participation. The list of “tasks” constitutes the contributions we expect students to make to the deliverable product associated with the editing project. With that in mind, for the purposes of our individual universities, we constructed specific lists detailing the activities students will undertake related to specific institution Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).

Students will (goals):

- Transcribe and edit.
- Apply rules of transcription to some/all of a rarely referenced early modern text.
- Produce an accurate transcription.
- Research the textual history and cultural history of the text.
- Edit/gloss the text, including footnotes for clarity and comprehension.
- Design presentation of text/transcription for open access to undergraduate product.
- Produce a substantial enough sample to add to a Senior Portfolio or graduate school application.

Students will (tasks):

- Complete the accompanying course for transcription.
- Choose a text or continue an ongoing project to transcribe and edit .
- Propose weekly goals for the task and estimate the labor and tasks required to complete each week’s goals, in collaboration with other student(s) working on text.
- Communicate weekly with other student(s) also working on text. Such interaction may be achieved through social media, discussion forum, etc. These fora would be spaces to discuss challenges, ask questions, and seek confirmation when transcribing difficult passages, struggling with text history or articulating some aspect of the text for clarity or comprehension.

Establishing the Summer Undergraduate Research Project

We are working within the minimal budgets available at small universities (provided primarily by small internal undergraduate research grants). We will also work with one or two texts—from Early English Books Online (EEBO) or from open access sources of digital early modern texts—and use Dromio for our edited texts to determine what might best work for undergraduates new to manuscript and early print texts. Moving forward, we plan to work with colleagues and students in both computer science and technical writing / mass communication colleagues to develop a platform that can be housed at one of the participating universities.[\[Z\]](#) Here we find that the resources of two institutions will be a real advantage. The specialties in these related fields differ slightly at our two schools, and we can take advantage of grants and other funds available for undergraduate research initiatives in both institutions.

Recruiting

Small universities do have their advantages. Recruiting students who are interested in this kind of work is ongoing through the classes we teach in related subject areas. With one or two faculty members per field to contact, visiting classes, pitching the project to specific faculty, and word of mouth should suffice to spread the words about the class and project. As the sole early modern faculty in our respective departments, both faculty members proposing this project can recruit from our courses directly.

Parameters for textual consideration:

For a project such as ours, we have to walk a fine line with what is accessible and interesting to students but also what is substantial enough to justify a summer (or multiple summers) undertaking. With this balance in mind, we’ve identified some texts that we believe are at the margins of scholarly attention where our students could do useful work without overlapping efforts underway elsewhere. The following works will provide a starting place for our students:

- *The Nine English Worthies*, Robert Fletcher, 1606, (practice text)
- *Thomas, Lord Cromwell*, Anonymous, 1613

- sixteenth-century English translations of devotional texts
- Emblem Books—particularly appealing for students who also want to address visual imagery. (While an English Emblem Book Project exists at Penn State Libraries, it is not open access, and for the purposes of undergraduate research, these texts might be ideal for exploring both textual and visual editing.)
- Printed sixteenth or seventeenth century recipe books

Coursework

Overview of ENG 445: Introduction to Textual Editing

We have created a syllabus (see appendix) for a course aiming to train students in some of the basic theory, methodology, and practice of textual editing necessary for the kind of cooperative undergraduate research project we have in mind. As we are looking to recruit students who have some experience with early modern texts at the upper division level, the class will be offered at the 400 (senior) level. With that in mind, the prerequisites for the course are only those of other 300- and 400-level English courses (at CUW, the freshman English majors seminar, or the general lit/writing sequence, as well as a 200-level writing class). We will recommend, however, that students have completed either their Shakespeare requirement or their medieval/Renaissance requirement before participating in the course. Our assumption is that the specific nature of this course may draw a fairly small number of students, at least at first, so we have designed the course with the ability to be offered in either an independent study format or as a plenary course. In time we hope that we may be able to broaden the appeal of the course to attract students from other related disciplines where textual editing is an important task, such as Classical Studies, Classical Languages, Renaissance/Reformation Studies, Modern European Languages, and Biblical Languages, History, and Digital Humanities.

We designed the course around three major units, beginning with some initial theoretical work from Eric Kelemen's textbook *Textual Editing and Criticism (TE&C)* and culminating with work on an EMROC manuscript using the Folger's Dromio software. As structured, we intend the class to run during a traditional 15-week semester, but it could also be adapted into a compressed format for a January term or summer offering.

The first unit works with some introductory ideas, as well as the transcription of printed text as a format with which we expect the students to be more comfortable initially. The first chapter of *TE&C* lays out the philosophy, purpose, and goals of textual editing. It poses many of the central questions about the editing project, including readability vs. accurate reproduction, competing copy texts, original intent vs. final intent, and the appropriateness of presumed corrections. As a first exercise, students will look at selections from Q1 and F1 of *King Lear* and/or Q1, Q2, and F1 of 3.2 in *Hamlet*. This experience will highlight the need to think strategically about producing an edited text through some well-known examples.^[8] The second chapter looks at the differences between manuscript and print transmission, as well as the issues inherent within various print technologies. The final chapter in Part One of the

textbook introduces the idea of textual criticism and producing edited texts for different purposes and audiences. Providing an additional perspective, Joseph Grigley's essay, "The Textual Event," addresses working with the idiosyncrasies of a unique copy, or witness, text. Students will work on transcribing and editing short pieces as weekly exercises, and the culminating project for Unit 1 will be to produce an edition of Act I from *The Tragedy of Mariam*, which is reproduced as one of the practice texts in the appendices of the book. Students will be required to produce 3 documents as part of the assignment: a clean transcription of the text, an edited text appropriate for a modern academic audience (regularizing spelling and punctuation, and identifying where glosses would be appropriate), and a short exposition of the student's choices and methods.

The second unit will focus primarily on manuscript culture and some basic principles of paleography. The main daily practice for this unit will come from the online Cambridge English Handwriting course with its transcription exercises. With the theory established in Unit 1, Unit 2 will have a heavy emphasis on developing reading/transcribing strategies through practical experience. The second Major Editing Project will be Richard Rolle's "The Pricke of Conscience," available through Harvard's online digital manuscript collections. The assignment will ask for the same three elements as the first assignment.

The final unit will be devoted entirely to the Baumfylde manuscript, Folger MS Va 456. Students will each transcribe and edit 5 recipes (from at least 3 separate hands) from the manuscript, working collaboratively to establish a common set of editorial standards to produce a unified collection. (The nature of this project will vary widely, depending on the number of students in the class). During the final exam time, students will present their work for evaluation by their peers so that they can be collected into one larger edited text.

Our goal is that students will leave this class with the basic skills necessary to participate in the collaborative editing project described above.

Conclusion: Digital Humanities and Future Collaborations

Developing undergraduate research projects in the humanities is difficult enough; applying the project to early modern studies at schools without early modern archival resources can seem insurmountable. We believe we've found a strategy that addresses previous barriers to this kind of research. Tools like Dromio, collections like those at the Folger, and organizations like EMROC have made it possible for students at small institutions to have contact with unique primary documents. We hope to combine the established advantages of small schools (such as low student-to-faculty ratios) with access to materials and other learners to create an impactful learning experience for the students that also contributes to scholarly knowledge.

Appendix

English 445: Introduction to Textual Editing

Prerequisites

Students need to complete either English 190: Introduction to English Studies or the standard English 103/104 sequence in the core, as well as the Advanced Writing major requirement of either English 245 or English 246 before enrolling in this course. As the work in the course focuses primarily on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, we strongly recommend that students complete either English 344: British Literature I or English 465: Shakespeare, as well.

Required Texts:

Eric Kelemen *Textual Editing and Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Norton, 2016)

Course Objectives:

In this class we will work with the history, theory, and practice of textual editing as a scholarly enterprise. We will initially explore concerns of reconciling differing copy texts, the responsibility and ethics of corrections, and the principles of preparing texts for a modern reader. Students will learn to transcribe both printed and manuscript materials; practice regularizing spelling, orthography, and punctuation according to intended goals; and prepare samples of early modern texts for a modern reading audience.

Course Requirements:

Students will be expected to keep up with daily readings and be prepared to join in class discussions and activities. Weekly practice homework assignments over the material from the textbook and from class will comprise a substantial portion of the course grade. Students can also expect a variety of graded collaborative activities, both in and out of class.

The major grade in the course will come from three individual editing projects at the end of each unit. I will distribute more information on these assignments as the semester progresses, and we will work toward their completion through individual conferences, discussion, and the other assigned work for the course.

Grades:

In general, your grade will reflect the amount of effort you invest in the semester and the quality of your work. I will figure your grade following these approximate percentages:

Daily homework and activities: 30%

Major Editing Project 1:	20%
Major Editing Project 2	20%
Major Editing Project 3:	20%
Final Presentation:	10%

Grading Standards

Here are the criteria I will use in grading editing projects:

A: An “A” projects is rich in content, well-organized and show a good deal of stylistic finesse. There is a clear understanding of the principles involved and a well-constructed explication of the methodology. They balance a mastery of the original conventions of the text with as sensitivity to the modern reader’s expectations, producing a clear, comprehensible textual product.

B: A “B” project delivers a solid finished text, with clarity and consistency of the conventions used throughout. The explanation of rationale for editorial choices may be adequate but not overly developed. Stylistic features are correct but unpolished.

C: A “C” project demonstrates an average engagement of the subject matter but goes no further than the barest requirement of the assignment. The rationale of methodology is minimal, and the finished text may show inconsistencies in orthographical regularization.

D: A D paper does not adequately demonstrate knowledge of the transcription and editing processes. The transcription contains obvious errors, and the finished edition does not adequately present the text for the audience, and the rationale is insufficient.

F: An F paper does not appropriately respond to the assignment or the standards it lays out.

Course Schedule

Week 1	Introduction, terms, and definitions
Week 2	Kelemen, <i>TE&C</i> , chapter 1 <i>King Lear</i> [] Q1 and F1 <i>Hamlet</i> 3.2 in Q1, Q2, and F1

Week 3	Kelemen, <i>TE&C</i> , Chapter 2 Spenser, "Letter to Raleigh" from <i>FQ</i>
Week 4	Kelemen, <i>TE&C</i> , Chapter 3 Cranmer, "On Ceremonies" from 1549 <i>BCP</i>
Week 5	Grigely, "The Textual Event," <i>TE&C</i> (195-225) Major Editing Assignment 1 Due: <i>Tragedy of Mariam</i>, Act I
Week 6	Cambridge English Handwriting—Lesson 1-2
Week 7	Cambridge English Handwriting—Lesson 3-4
Week 8	Hanna, "Producing Manuscripts and Editions," <i>TE&C</i> (333-362) Cambridge English Handwriting—Lesson 5-6
Week 9	Cambridge English Handwriting—Lesson 7-8
Week 10	Cambridge English Handwriting—Lesson 22 Major Editing Assignment 2 Due: Rolle, "The Pricke of Conscience"
Week 11	Baumfylde MS Project
Week 12	Baumfylde MS Project
Week 13	Baumfylde MS Project
Week 14	Baumfylde MS Project
Week 15	Baumfylde MS Project

Finals	Final Presentations During Exam Period
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Brian Harries is an associate professor and chair of English at Concordia University Wisconsin, specializing in medieval and Renaissance literature. His research interests include the ancient world in Shakespeare, early modern drama, issues of public memory in Elizabethan England, and the impact of the Reformation. He has published several articles and essays, including “Sacral Objects and the Measure of Kingship in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*,” in Mardock and McPherson, eds., *Stages of Engagement: Drama and Religion in Post-Reformation England* (2015), “The Fall of Mediterranean Rome in *Titus Andronicus*” in *Mediterranean Studies* (2018), and “Deciphering the Dead: Speaking for Corpses in Early Modern Drama” in William Engel and Grant Williams, eds. *The Shakespearean Death Arts* (2021). As a dramaturge and assistant director, he regularly collaborates on theater productions at his university.

Notes

[1] Emily Christina Murphy and Shannon R. Smith. “Undergraduate Students and Digital Humanities Belonging: Metaphors and Methods for Including Undergraduate Research in DH Communities.” *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly* 11.3 (2017): 16.

[2] Claire Battershill, Helen Southworth, Alice Staveley, Michael Widner, Elizabeth Willson Gordon, and Nicola Wilson, *Scholarly Adventures in the Digital Humanities: Making the Modernist Archives Publishing Project* (London: Palgrave, 2018).

[3] Amy DeRogatis and Isaac Weiner outline a similar project to engage students as primary researchers through a digital project in “Turning Students into Scholars: Using Digital Methods to Teach the Critical Study of Religion,” *Religion* 48.2 (2018): 255-61.

[4] For more information about the goals and processes EMROC’s Dawson project: <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/ongoing-projects/the-dawson-project>

[5] Information about Dromio can be found through the Folger’s website here: <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/transcribathons/transcribathon-instructions-glossaries-and-more/dromio-a-primer> and here <https://www.archivejournal.net/notes/transcribing-manuscripts-online-with-emmo/>

[6] Peter M.W. Robinson, “Project-based Digital Humanities and Social, Digital, and Scholarly Editions,” *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, 31.4 (2016): 875-889, 876.

[7] Alternately, we may use an online site that our institutions need not maintain, which, according to Bridget Almas, Emad Khazraee, Matthew Thomas Miller, and Joshua Westgard, is the preference of most scholars doing this kind of collaborative work (para 8). They also provide a detailed and useful survey of online tools for scholars digitizing and transcribing manuscripts, with some suggestions for developing edited copies of the text in “Manuscript Study in Digital Spaces: The State of the Field and New Ways Forward,” in *DHQ* 12.2 (2018): 19 pp.

[8] Additionally, Peter Robinson provides some useful theorizing of the collaborative editorial process in “Some Principles for Making Collaborative Scholarly Editions in Digital Form.” *DHQ* 11.2 (2017): 18 pp.

[9] Joseph Grigley, “The Textual Event,” in *Textual Editing and Criticism*, ed. Erik Keleman (New York: Penguin, 2009): 194-225.