
Using e-learning systems for DH teaching: the Spanish Humanidades Digitales case study at LINHD

Elena González-Blanco

egonzalezblanco@flog.uned.es

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Spain

Gimena Del Rio

gdelrio.riande@gmail.com

CONICET-SECRIT, Argentina

Clara Martínez

cimartinez@flog.uned.es

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Spain

Introduction

Digital humanities teaching programs are today widespread mostly in North American and European universities. However, they are very different in terms of content, focus and audience and as mentioned, they are distributed unevenly around the world, while often linked to diverse academic policies. Some programs are long-term focused, shaped as masters or graduate degrees (with well-known pioneer examples at King's College, Virginia or Pisa, with the so-called *Informativa Umanistica*). Summer and spring schools have also had great importance in this field, getting researchers into digital humanities as a complementary training and opening new horizons for traditional DH scholars. Names such as Oxford, Victoria and Leipzig deserve a special mention in this area.

Networks like [DiXiT](#), and DH infrastructures such as [DARIAH](#) and [CLARIN](#) are making continuous efforts to centralize, standardize, unify and inform on the different nature, options and advantages of DH training programs. Some examples of these efforts can be appreciated in the deliverables of DARIAH (Sahle 2013), the [CUNY list of curricula](#), the [DARIAH course registry](#) and [German open-access teaching materials](#), as well as many other resources available on the web, with special mention to the [DARIAH Teach](#) Erasmus plus project, which is now on the spot on the future for DH teaching.

The Spanish Case

This paper presents the Spanish DH programs developed at LINHD as an innovative case-study from the Spanish-speaking DH community with the aim to illustrate the global teaching panorama. Most of the syllabi of the DH courses at LINHD have been developed under a common collaboration between Spain and Argentina, focused on a broad Spanish-speaking audience and applying e-learning teaching methods. The use of these virtual technologies and methodologies is the success milestone of this initiative, as it constantly reaches students from different backgrounds and profiles and from different parts of the world (Spain but also Latin America and Europe) as long as they are Spanish speakers.

We will first focus on the curricular design of all the programs offered by LINHD, followed by a detailed explanation of the teaching methodology.

The Design Of A DH Curriculum

LINHD was created in 2014 based on three axes: research, training and dissemination. It launched its first DH summer school: "Introducción a las Humanidades Digitales" in July 2014, getting more than 50 students involved. The summer school was followed by a longer DH program of 30 ECTS credits, lasting from December to September and amplifying all the contents that had been announced in the summer school. The strategy has been similar in the following years, in 2015, summer school was devoted to digital scholarly editing and a new longer winter training program was launched for 2015-2016. This last year, we decided to focus on DH methodologies applied to a specific field, poetry, which had as a result a high-quality summer school on this topic that is at the heart of LINHD projects and research interests. Taking into account the interests of the community, the needs of the field and the offers of new programs in different places, our new proposal for this year, starting in January 2017 is Semantic web technologies and language resources, introducing NLP possibilities for humanities, useful tools, and stylometry, Semantic web technologies will be the second focus of this summer school, supported and cofinanced by CLARIN as a CLARIN user involvement event.

Our strategy for designing curricula for all these programs has been twofold: first, we have always used as a model the reference curricula for DH mentioned above, along with the needs of the scholars in our own environment. There have been three keys for success: having a DH compliant interdisciplinary teaching faculty, variety in content (our first DH course covered a

huge range of topics going from databases, TEI markup, semantic web, visualization to digital libraries), and flexibility to change, thanks to the lessons learned every year.

Distant Teaching Methodology

LINHD is based at UNED, the biggest Spanish university, founded more than 40 years ago, which uses semi-present and virtual teaching methods as its unique strategy. This has been a cornerstone for developing our DH teaching programs, as we have used UNED infrastructures as a key part of our teaching methodology. For summer schools, we use a double teaching model: there are keynote lessons with students in the room, but sessions are also recorded and broadcasted in streaming and can be viewed later. Students may choose to attend the school in either of these two ways and receive the same certification. Both options are combined with a virtual teaching platform (called aLF, designed by UNED) where professors upload slides and teaching materials and students interact with them.

The longer winter courses are only offered online using the aLF virtual platform as the main communication channel among students and faculty members, but the platform includes videos, exercises and virtual research environments as teaching materials to train students all over the world.

Anyway, the challenges we often face in our courses deal with:

- **Creation of the materials.** Two sided: on one hand, the materials should be written in Spanish; on the other hand, most of the “technical” documentation lacks a DH perspective (Ej. PHP, MySQL databases). This is a very important point, as although there are a lot of open access materials on the web on DH training, it has not been enough for us to translate them (Cordell 2015). It has been necessary to re-create the problems, to adapt existing materials to our own needs and examples (our libraries, our projects), and also to regroup the different cues on a not-yet consolidated DH history in Spanish.
- Teach an eminently hands-on field through a **distant method and virtual learning** (Forum, exercises). This has been one of our main pillars, in which we are proud to present our most innovative product in the DH world: online teaching has proven to be the present and the future of education, but has

not been extended yet to the DH field (Bergmann 2013, Koller 2012). This way of teaching implies, however a specialized production of teaching materials and also a special faculty training, as they have to produce slides, videos, written materials and quizzes and tests for which they have to offer interactive help and solutions. Although this might look an extra workload for our teachers, the experience shows that all these efforts remain as digital contents (it is nice to have a look at the libraries of our [YouTube channel](#)), in which we add as open access materials all the recorded sessions of our courses.

- **Make visible** the DH training inside and outside the Spanish speaking world. This is an important point for us, not just as a way of getting more students, but also as a way of clearing the path to consolidating DH as an academic discipline (Trejos 2013). As our academic structure is pretty resistant to interdisciplinary work, we have to use social networks and other dissemination channels to go beyond barriers and reach our public outside our university. The result is a very mixed group of students coming from different parts of our country, and from other countries too. The challenge: identifying the ways to arrive at all these potentially interested groups. We work together in collaboration with scholars from Argentina, Mexico, Colombia and other universities and try to expand our visibility as much as possible.

In this presentation we will explore the success and difficulties we have faced in the use of this combined methodological approach during this 3 years, involving more than 500 students of different backgrounds, languages and countries. Expanding this model to other teaching programs and continue experimenting with new DH curricula proposal are the next plans at LINHD.

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