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# Data Literacy and the Role of Libraries

**Dr. des. Catrina Langenegger** MAS LIS | Historian, Subject Librarian for Jewish Cultural and Literary History

**Johanna Schüpbach** MAS LIS | Subject Librarian for Anglophone Linguistics and Literature and General Linguistics

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# Data Literacy and the Role of Libraries

- The academic library is much more than a place for (old) books!
  - It has become a service provider for students and academics.
  - Host to in-house skills and knowledge on a variety of academic and academia adjacent topics.
- Subject Librarians (should) function as a bridge between the University Library and academia.
  - In Basel (since 2020): Digital Humanities Work Group (AG DH) to impart basic skills, provide support, and competences on DH methods and tools.
  - The AG DH are not necessarily “DH experts”:
    - But: Being at times only one step ahead of students means that there’s an understanding of what’s needed to get started in DH.
  - The AG DH is still building and refining their training portfolio.
- Presented on the following slides: Three different teaching formats to introduce students to topics of DH:
  1. Full semester course (MA research seminar)
  2. 90-minute session on subject specific Data Literacy as part of an established IDM semester course
  3. 90-minute bespoke introduction to DH for a research seminar in (English) Literary Studies

# 1. Full Semester Course: Research Seminar on the First Zionist Congresses in Basel (ST 2022)

- Collaboration with Prof. Dr. phil. Erik Petry: combining Jewish Studies, History and Digital Humanities
- With sources from the holdings of the University Library and other institutions

## Goal of the course

- Introducing students to a variety of DH methods and tools
- Provide / equip students with a basic understanding and to set them up for their own chosen projects
  - Very much a «hands-on» course → required active participation and self study!
  - Students presented their projects, conference-like, at the end of the semester
- Visit to the University Library's digitisation centre as a highlight
- Also guest speakers / presentations (e.g. RISE for an introduction to Transkribus)

## Conclusions

- Demanded a big initial effort; used lots of resources
  - Was only possible because it served as a pilot project → not sustainable to offer regularly!
- Laid the groundwork and provided the experience for other courses and formats.
- Gave the DH Work Group an idea of the scope of their DH skills and competences – and their limits.

## 2. Data Literacy - A Session Within an Existing IDM Semester Course

- 90-minute sessions for a subject-specific input on working with data / Data Literacy within a semester course on information, data and media literacy

### Main goals for the session

- Knowing about relevant sources – where to get data sets and/or corpora – and how to assemble and work with them (e.g. analyse and visualise)
- Gaining an understanding of working with subject-specific data (what are the possibilities?)
- Learning about people and contacts at the University (Library) who could provide project-specific help, skills & knowledge if needed further studies/research.

### PRO

- All subject areas can request this IDM course from the University Library.
- Shows working with data in the context of the whole research/study cycle of their chosen subject.
- Part of a well-established format (also positive experience in collaborating with course organisers).

### CON

- Just enough time for a very broad overview (showing what's available, who could help, where to look).
  - Depending on the subject, almost everything could be used as data!
- Depends on students' subsequent self-study and willingness to acquire knowledge/skills as needed.

### 3. On Request – An Introduction to DH in a Literary Studies Research Seminar on Early Modern Travel Writing

- Request to prepare a bespoke 90-minute session introducing the students to DH & working with digital texts.
  - As basis for the students' group project to create a map with nodegoat later in term.
  - Using travel writing texts from the 16.-18. Century from their curriculum that are also in the UB holdings.

#### PRO

- Teaching at the University Library allowed for showing some of the original 16.-18. century texts, thus the change from the physical to the digital visible and tangible.
- Focus only on texts as data allowed for a bit more depth.
- Could talk to students about related subjects such as metadata, authority files, and subject terms.
- Great benefit for the University Library
  - Strengthening ties between institutes and the library and gets to showcase & promote work with/on its (digital) holdings.

#### CON

- Heterogeneous group of MA students
  - From «never heard about DH before» to doing an MA in DH
- Time constraint of a one-off session
  - No «bite sized» inputs as with the semester course.
- Format relies heavily on professors / teaching staff to see University Library as a partner in crime
  - The University Library needs to be known as more than a «place with books»!

# Data Literacy and the Role of Libraries?

## Coming full circle (but with a question mark)

### Open and ongoing questions for the DH Work Group

- What are the needs of researchers and students in terms of DH knowledge and information, data and media literacy?
  - In this context: What do students and researchers need from their university library?
- What is the role of the university library / academic librarians as a service provider and partner?
  - Providing (teaching) services in addition to access to source material?
  - Promoting research with and of the library's (historical) holdings?
- How can libraries / librarians best communicate and impart their services & skills to students and academics?
  - Where do you see the possibility for your academic library to support and raise awareness with working with historical documents and source material?

### “But why should university libraries do this?”

- University libraries provide stability and longevity. (→ *memory* institutions!)
- They own source material and possesses knowledge and core competences in dealing with it.
- They fill a service gap by providing and imparting general / basic skills, overviews, and introductions.



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# Many Thanks for your attention.

**Dr. des. Catrina Langenegger** MAS LIS | [c.langenegger@unibas.ch](mailto:c.langenegger@unibas.ch)  
**Johanna Schüpbach** MAS LIS | [johanna.schuepbach@unibas.ch](mailto:johanna.schuepbach@unibas.ch)

**Digital Humanities at the University Library Basel** | <https://ub.unibas.ch/en/services/dh-digital-services/digital-humanities/>