The use of empirical methods – involving collection and analysis of data – is not new in literary studies, but it has always been a marginal practice in a discipline dominated by qualitative forms of historical and hermeneutical criticism. Lately, however, scholars exploring the potential of digital tools for literary analysis as well as those proposing new articulations of literary studies with sociology have reopened the question of empirical method. In this class, we will look at some emergent quantitative approaches together with the theoretical and political debates they have occasioned. We will consider the core concept of “data” and the ontology of datasets as these pertain to literature; the kinds of research project that can or cannot be assisted by surveys, statistics, and measurements; and the social and institutional stakes of embracing a computational paradigm in the humanities. We will all learn a little bit of computer programming, using the open source programming language R for statistical analysis and graphics. Programming tutorials and other assistance will be available throughout the term in the Vitale II media lab.

This is an introductory-level graduate class, open to highly advanced undergraduate majors by permission. Assigned reading will be fairly heavy at 150-200 pages per week and everyone, including auditors, is expected to complete the readings prior to class meetings. Other required work will include short essays and thought experiments, simple computer programming tutorials and problem sets, data-based projects, and oral presentations. As this is a 500-level course, no full-length research paper will be assigned and no particular background knowledge is expected.

We will be using a Canvas site for this class. If you are unfamiliar with Canvas and would like a tutorial, let me know and I’ll make arrangements with the Library. Nearly all assigned readings are available in pdf format from the Electronic Reserves tab on the Canvas site. Where a reading has been excerpted from a book, the book is on reserve at the Rosengarten desk in Van Pelt lower level. Please purchase a print or Kindle copy of Franco Moretti’s *Distant Reading* (Verso 2013).

Much of our class time will be spent on presentations, debates, small-group activities, project planning, and problem solving. Several of our class meetings will be workshops or tutorials led by guest scholars.
SCHEDULE

Aug 28
Introduction: Objectives and Expectations
Workshop 1: Keyword definitions
Workshop 2: Brainstorming in-class activities and exercises
Tech skills: how we will learn to program using R

I. The Data of Literary Reception: Readers, Taste, Commerce

Sept 4
Taste, Class, Gender, Habitus

Sept 11
National Readerships: India, Nigeria, Australia
GUEST SCHOLAR: Priya Joshi
Priya Joshi, “Quantitative Method and Literary History” (2002)
Joshi, “Consuming Fiction” from Another Country (2002)
Robert Darnton: “Reading, Writing, and Publishing in 18th Century France” (1971)
John Frow and Tony Bennett, “Reading by Numbers,” from Accounting For Tastes (1999)

Sept 18
Literary Commerce: Readers as Consumers
William St Clair, “Reading Constituencies” from The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period (2006)
St Clair, “The Political Economy of Reading” (2005/2012)
John B. Thompson, “The Polarization of the Field” from Merchants of Culture (2010)
Tim Aubry, “Aghanistan Meets the Amazon” (2009)
Ed Finn, “Becoming Yourself: The Afterlife of Reception” (2011)

II. Linguistic Data: Algorithmic Approaches to Content, Meaning, and Style

Sept 25
Stylistics and its Critics
Stanley Fish, “What is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?” and “What is Stylistics . . . About It, Part II” (1979)
Michaela Mahlberg, “Corpus Stylistics” and “Character Speech” from *Corpus Stylistics and Dickens’s Fiction* (2013)

Oct 2  Machine Reading
Matthew Jockers, “Macroanalysis” and “Style” from *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods & Literary History* (2013)

Oct 9  No Class, Fall Break

Oct 16  Topic Modeling
DHF Workshop 12:00-1:30
GUEST SCHOLAR: Andrew Goldstone
Andrew Goldstone, “*Social Science and Profanity at DH2014*” (2014)
Andrew Goldstone and Ted Underwood, “The Quiet Transformations of Literary Studies: What Thirteen Thousand Scholars Could Tell Us” (forthcoming); *Quiet Transformations website*
The Programming Historian “*Getting Started with Topic Modeling and Mallet*”

Oct 23  Workshop: Text Mining with R
GUEST SCHOLAR: Katie Rawson
Assignments TBA

III. Big Literary Data: Maps, Systems, and the Circulation of Forms

Oct 30  Distant Reading and its Critics
Andrew Milner, “Literature, Culture, and Society” pp. 116-140
Katherine Bode “Literary Studies in the Digital Age,” from Reading By Numbers (2012)
Eric Hayot, “Scale, Data, and World Literature” (slideshow)

Polemics:
David Golumbia, “Death of a Discipline”
Katie Trumpener, “Paratext and Genre System: A Response to Franco Moretti”
Moretti, “Relatively Blunt”

Nov 6  Circulation and Mapping  DHF Workshop 12:00-1:30  GUEST SCHOLAR: Ryan Cordell
Ryan Cordell, “Uncovering Patterns of Reprinting in Antebellum American Newspapers” (forthcoming)
Mapping the Republic of Letters: Case Studies

IV. Visualizing Data: Graphesis and Knowledge Production
Nov 13  Visualization and Interpretation
Johanna Drucker, “Humanities Approaches to Graphical Display” (2011)
Stéfan Sinclair, Stan Ruecker, and Milena Radzikowska, “Information Visualization for Humanities Scholars” online at MLACommons (2013)

Nov 20  Character Networks and Character Space
UWGB Dracula Character and Text Network
Franco Moretti, “Network Theory, Plot Analysis” (2011)

Nov 27  No Class, Thanksgiving
Dec 4  Final Class: Lightening-Round Presentations