



RESEARCH2REALITY

Shining a light on research & innovation.

So, You Say You Want a Revolution

An interview with Professor Constance Crompton
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What is digital humanities research?

Often I'm confronted by people who say, "*Digital humanities, what could that possibly be?*" Or we think that all you could possibly be doing in the humanities is hanging out in dusty archives, and that we're combining hanging out in dusty archives, which is a real pleasure, with the computing side of things which is also a real pleasure. What can we learn, for example, algorithmically reading 5,000 texts from the nineteenth century to look for patterns or to discover new knowledge, to find research questions that we couldn't ask without computers? Within the digital humanities, my research interest is in considering what the digital medium can let us know about a humanities' content. One of the projects I'm working on is a chronology of the gay liberation movement in Canada. And so there, we're working with a base text which is a fabulous list of events, all the things that happened in the gay liberation movement. We've got poetry readings, protests, legislative change, and it's great to read it front to back - you can find out what's happening. But what we're doing is using graph databases in order to slice and recombine that information so that we can look at just political change over time, or do statistical analysis to see how that movement changes, how those ideas move about in a way that we couldn't just get at by reading the text.

How can the past inform the future?

The humanities don't always have that commercialization opportunity or layer; however, happily with federally funded projects, we're then free not only to hire students and to train them to be leaders in the humanities, but also to share our work publicly without a kind of paywall. Understanding history is part of the superpower of the humanities, and so one of the things we're hoping for with the gay liberation in Canada project, is to understand how gay liberation was formed, but also from that, how new movements might benefit from the struggles that people went through before. So how are these things structured and how could we forge a new kind of inclusive future because we understand where we came from, how we got here?