

A Primer for The Creative Media & Digital Culture Program; Its Relationship to the Field

Part I: The CMDC Program

We talk in terms of Superpowers and believe everyone has at least one. The faculty's approach is to help student identify their superpowers and encourage their development so that when students graduate from the program, they are able to excel in their careers.

The CMDC's Goals and Objectives help to achieve this mission. Courses are aligned to them and Standards of Excellence established to foster student success.

Goal 1	<p>Demonstrate competency with computers for designing, distributing, researching, retrieving, and preserving digital works in various mediums for humane and effective human-computer interactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Produce web pages and other digital interfaces and/or environments for effective and functional human-computer interactions B. Apply Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to hand-code web pages C. Employ web and other digital interfaces and/or environments that respond to specific audience needs, as well as usability and accessibility issues D. Learn various methods of researching for online information, such as databases, wikis, and websites, and of evaluating its credibility 	DTC 201, DTC 335, DTC 336, DTC 355, DTC 356, DTC 435, DTC 477, DTC 478, DTC 497
Goal 2	<p>Synthesize media forms for multimedia contexts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Organize multimedia for web pages and other digital interfaces and/or environments using various graphics, sound, and video authoring tools B. Develop a multimedia project that incorporates various media objects, such as video, animation, sound, and still images. 	DTC 201, DTC 335, DTC 375, DTC 354, DTC 355, DTC 435, DTC 477, DTC 497
Goal 3	<p>Employ the principles for sophisticated manipulation of various forms of digital media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Practice visual fundamentals such as composition, figure/ground relationships, rhythm, contrast, and color. B. Create and compare print and screen based media, understanding the affordances and constraints of each in the production of visual, sonic, haptic, kinetic, and kinesthetic elements C. Create and arrange images and other content in sequence and in non-linear form, demonstrating the conceptual underpinnings of the digital image and its application to time-based media D. Utilize textual content as visual rhetoric in the process of designing interactive media interfaces that are both functional and usable. 	DTC 201, DTC 335, DTC 336, DTC 354, DTC 435
Goal 4	<p>Understand the production and assessment of media objects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Understand basics of front end design as well as composition strategies for digital texts and environments B. Demonstrate an overall understanding and utilization of appropriate textual content for various forms of interactive media C. Produce and evaluate effective textual content that promotes interaction, functionality, and usability by different readers and needs. 	DTC 201, DTC 335, DTC 336, DTC 354, DTC 355, DTC 435, DTC 477, DTC 497, DTC 478
Goal 5	<p>Know the basics of information architecture and knowledge management along with ways digital information can be structured for retrieval and archival purposes for different audiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Examine the structure and culture of the disciplines, publishing cycles, and information flows control access to information. B. Demonstrate an understanding of how storage and retrieval systems control what information can be found. C. Use a variety of advanced techniques, such as Boolean searching, 	DTC 101, DTC 356, DTC 497

	<p>subject/descriptor searching, truncation, and proximity, to retrieve information effectively from a variety of electronic information retrieval systems, like subscription databases and the Web.</p> <p>D. Understand the use of language and vocabulary in information retrieval by exploring thesauri, indexes, concordances, and keyword-matching, as well as demonstrate comprehension of the differences, uses, and strengths of these various ways of using language to retrieve electronic information.</p>	
Goal 6	<p>Question the way digital media functions in multiple cultural contexts</p> <p>A. Examine the presentation of race, class, gender, and disabilities in digital media</p> <p>B. Interpret images found on the web from a cultural context different from your own</p>	DTC 101, DTC 475, DTC 476, DTC 497
Goal 7	<p>Recognize various forms of language processing and their implications for media authoring</p> <p>A. Use digital media terminology and concepts, such as medium, media, multimedia, mass media, remediation, repurposing, translation, text, textuality, language, and code, appropriately in presentations and projects</p> <p>B. Employ various types of texts, such as visual, auditory, kinetic, and kinesthetic texts, for appropriate mediums</p> <p>C. Illustrate the way artificial systems acquire language</p> <p>D. Demonstrate knowledge about the process by which is language is made via computers</p> <p>E. Study, create, and critique digital text and its central role in human-computer interactions</p> <p>F. Employ textual content in web pages and other digital interfaces or environments that respond to specific audience needs</p>	DTC 101, DTC 336, DTC 354, DTC 375, DTC 497
Goal 8	<p>Appreciate the history of technological development, from local to global perspectives, and its implications for a variety of mediums</p> <p>A. Demonstrate understanding between digital and analog technologies</p> <p>B. Compare and contrast technological development from a historical perspective</p> <p>C. Explain contributions of pioneers working in the US and beyond in the area of digital technology</p> <p>D. Discuss technologies of oral and written discourse, such as the importance of memory, the development of alphabets, invention of writing tools, and innovations for electronic devices</p> <p>E. Examine the way in which metaphors from print culture influence electronic information retrieval systems.</p>	DTC 101, DTC 375, DTC 476, DTC 497,
Goal 9	<p>Utilize an interdisciplinary perspective in order to understand the basics of social, economic, and education changes brought about by digital media</p> <p>A. Demonstrate knowledge of “digital divide” by explaining the various factors leading to it in the US and beyond</p> <p>B. Sketch an activity, program, or event that aims to assist marginalized populations with gaining access and understanding of digital media</p> <p>C. Write a cultural critique of media objects that looks at political economy, content, and audience reception of media objects</p> <p>D. Discuss “authority,” and the way information is and has been validated; interrogate the role of culture and technology in determining the validity and authority of information.</p> <p>E. Note the way in which public policies impact access to information.</p> <p>F. Create, and use information ethically.</p>	DTC 101, DTC 475, DTC 497
Goal 10	<p>Be practiced and capable communicators in all mediums</p> <p>A. Create a digital text in a variety of mediums</p> <p>B. Construct and deliver an argument focusing on the way the medium affects the message, audience, and other rhetorical components</p>	DTC 101, DTC 201, DTC 335, DTC 354, DTC 355, DTC 356, DTC 375, DTC 475,

	C. Evaluate the effective use of language in a digital text.	DTC 477, DTC 478, DTC 497
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It should also be mentioned that a special focus on ethics and civic engagement was also put into place in the program, beginning fall 2006. This focus spoke to the program's interest in aligning itself with national and international trends in digital media as well as its connection to the region. Beginning summer 2007 students in the senior seminar began to work with non-profit community-wide organizations whose missions were to aid the local population in the areas of homelessness, poverty, mental health, education, arts, and culture to produce media the organizations needed to thrive. This focus has resulted, for example, in the creation of interactive installations for The Oregon Museum for Science and Industry, websites for Walk & Knock Annual Food Drive, Open House Ministries, and At Home At School; videos for The Vancouver Symphony, the Council of the Homeless, and Vida's Ark; 3D simulations for the Vancouver's Downtown Association; and social media policy development for The Port of Vancouver, USA (See "Civic Engagement," http://web.me.com/dgrigar/DTC_Civic_Engagement/Home.html)

The result of this planning process was that by the end of four years, the program grew from 44 majors to 175, from offering four sections of courses each semester to offering 17, from teaching students how to analyze websites to producing new methods of developing and evaluating virtual objects for 3D simulations.

In summer 2010 The CMDC Program was asked to develop "Standards of Excellence" for underpinning expectations for its students and help to shape its university assessment plan. They are:

1. Envision, imagine and invent digital media objects that do not yet exist in the world and, in creating them, understand the importance to reflect upon their potential impact upon the people and cultures for which they are made and by which they will be used
2. Engage in the rigorous examination of assumptions and values about the self, others, and the world in order to advance knowledge and promote wisdom for bettering the environment and human condition
3. Communicate ideas and viewpoints clearly, elegantly, and creatively with a variety of technologies and modes of expression
4. Delight in discovery and experimentation, recognizing that leadership in innovation demands courage and curiosity and requires an understanding of many forms of and approaches to knowledge
5. Place civic engagement and service to the community at the heart of creation and innovation

These Standards have been vetted by a series of committees including students, alums, its advisory committee, and faculty outside the university who participate in the field of digital media.

In sum, The Program has been built so that the completion of its requirements prepares students to compete for highly technical and creative jobs that require an attentiveness to critical thinking and a strong ethical base when working with technology, as well as promote leadership and research skills; and it also prepares students for entry into top graduate programs in the US and abroad.

Part 2: Its Relationship to the Field

The term "new media" was introduced widely in academe with the publication of Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* in 2001. Since then much debate has emerged over the term with the main opposition centering on the word "new" and what it means for future media that emerge. The trend, now, is to refer the larger field as *digital* media and to think of digital media objects, as Manovich suggests, as more than merely "texts distributed on a computer" but rather as "computable" texts that involve numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and cultural transcoding" (19-20). Put simply, it means that digital media can include Emily Dickenson's poetry archived on a website as well as a sensor-based, interactive VJ performance involving cars outfitted with sensor-based technology.

The study of digital media has branched out into five main areas: Digital Humanities, Media Arts/Digital Media/New Media, Media Studies, Media Communication, and Information Studies. Centers and academic units have been built up around these areas to the point that we can provide a description of each:

- Digital Humanities: Production and examination of texts, with a focus on digitalization of analog objects for the purpose of preservation and dissemination; theory and practice
- Media Arts/Digital Media/New Media: Production and examination of objects produced by and for computer technologies, such as video, animation, website, digital installation or performance, etc.; theory and practice with a strong “born digital” approach
- Media Studies: Critique and study of media (both analog and digital); primarily a theory-based program seen frequently in Communications and Film Studies programs
- Media Communication: Expansion of journalism and strategic communication (i.e. public relations, advertising) into the digital realm with emphasis on the use of the web for disseminating information; theory and practice.
- Information Studies: Study of the structure and dissemination of information; can be found in a variety of disciplines from Library Science to Management Information Systems.

Other names and foci exist (i.e. Human Computer Interface, Multimedia Design) but the five mentioned above constitute the major categories under which many programs or scholarship fit. The CMDC Program has positioned itself in all of them, hiring faculty to represent each of the areas as their areas of research and teaching.

Because the terminology can get confusing when one considers that the larger field and subfield as well as the works generated from them are called digital media, we generally refer to digital media works as “media objects,” a term that came into wide use through the works by N. Katherine Hayles. There are currently 15 forms/genres of digital media. Ten of these were identified by Manovich in *The Language of New Media*, but five others have been added to his list since the publication of his book over a decade ago:

1. Websites
2. Virtual Worlds
3. Virtual & Augmented Reality
4. Multimedia
5. Computer Games
6. Interactive Installations
7. Computer Animation
8. Digital Video & Cinema
9. Human-Computer Interface
10. Digital Music/Sound (includes podcasts)
11. Internet Radio
12. Digital Photography
13. Digital Television
14. Mobile Apps
15. Wearables and Sensory Devices
16. ePubs

Thus, the aim of the program is to introduce these objects to students, teach them how to produce them, and encourage them to innovate them and foster an educational environment where they can learn to produce new ones that do not yet exist on this list.

Additionally, a theoretical approach to thinking about digital media has emerged over the years, some of which were borrowed from mass media/communications studies. These are important to note because they serve to unite faculty

coming from seemingly disparate fields of study, making it not only possible but also easy for a digital media scholar from performance studies, for example, to work closely with and understand the work of a digital media scholar from anthropology. It also makes it possible for faculty from disparate disciplines who share a training and background in digital media to be evaluated and even tenured in the same academic unit. Thus, they suggest what is meant by a “born digital” sensibility.

The philosophical concepts/guiding principles listed below are drawn from major international scholars and/or publications:

1. A computer is not a tool or prosthesis that helps us to accomplish something; rather, it is the medium in which we work. (Oliver Grau, *MediaArtHistories*, 2007)
2. Text is any form of information by which we communicate an idea, feeling, or concept. (Mats Dahlstrom, “When Is a Text Text?,” 2002)
3. The medium affects the message. (Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Massage*, 1967)
4. Digital media are material texts. (N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines*, 2002)
5. The artifact of new media is just as important as the process it took to produce it. (Jan Van Looy & Jan Baetens, *Close Reading New Media*, 2003)
6. Making is not separate from thinking. (Stephano Vannotti, “Let Us Do What We Do Best: But How Can We Produce Knowledge by Designing Interfaces?,” 2008)
7. The design of information is a conversation about ideas—not about persuading people to do things. (Robert Jacobson, “Information Design,” 2000).
8. Criticism of digital media should be specific to digital media and relies on the sensory modalities of the body for that critique rather than abstract ideas or theories. (N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines*, 2002)
9. Digital media involves an interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary study of art, science, and technology (Edward Shanken, *Telematic Embrace*, 2003) & the Humanities.
10. The hallmark of a digital scholarship is “collegiality,” “openness,” and “collaboration” (Tom Scheinfeldt, “Why Digital Humanities Is Nice,” 2012).

To put these concepts into perspective, it means that courses taught in a program that embraces them will involve hands on experiences for its students (#1) with emphasis not only on visual communications but also aural as well as gestural, etc. (#2). Students in such courses would be taught that moving print information to a website, for example, requires more than cutting and pasting text to the new environment but rather a careful consideration of the affordances the new medium makes available that the old one does not (#3). It also suggests that what students create is “real” and potentially can impact, in important ways, the society in which they live despite the objects “virtuality” (#4)— and because this potential does exist, creating media objects requires a strong ethical base from which to create. It also means that a successful completion of a media object is greatly influenced by the viability and usability of the object itself, as well as its aesthetic quality (#5). Thus, students learn that critical thinking and problem-solving sit at the foundation of everything they make (#6) and that the object may have many important uses, and so is not created solely to lead others into a particular action or to embrace a particular idea (#7). Students also learn to embody their work and to make sense of it through their own experiences, as well as those others may have experienced it (#8). Because each individual brings to the classroom unique backgrounds and training as well as personal interactions with information, it is understood that knowledge of multiple disciplines and teaching methods are needed to be implemented in the classroom of a digital media course (#9). And because so much of the work produced requires teamwork, those involved in the theory and production of digital objects work together in a manner that is collegial and open (#10).

In terms of the field's theoretical base, many early digital media scholars turned to print based theorists like Barthes, Derrida, Baudrillard, etc., but a recent movement has been afoot to develop theories unrelated to print based texts. N. Katherine Hayles' Media Specific Analysis, offered in her book, *Writing Machines*, is one such digital media specific theory to have emerged in the last five years. Interest in a new form of "close reading" that consists of practices from critical code studies is also finding traction.

In terms of its methodology, some digital media scholars embrace Roy Ascott's notion of "creative leaps" (98) found in his pioneering essay, "The Construction of Change" (1964), as a sound concept for interdisciplinary collaborations between art and technology and for laying a foundation for the development of academic art (and later humanities) programs "that [do] not eschew science" but rather embrace its methodologies (107). Current views about the interdisciplinarity expressed in the Association of American Universities' document entitled "Reinvigorating the Humanities" (See AAU, <http://www.aau.edu/policy/article.aspx?id=7182>) reflect this idea. Action Research generates from this intellectual perspective and has been adopted as a research methodology for media artists and designers. Action Research is a "systematic enquiry conducted through the medium of practical action, calculated to devise or test new, or newly imported, information, ideas, forms, or procedures and to generate communicable knowledge" that can be Research into/about Design, Research for Design, and Research through Design. It "supports" the idea "that practice and research could establish an effective liaison under specific circumstances;" "points out that as opposed to other research activities the intentional interference of the investigator is central to practical research;" and allows for one to "generate communicable knowledge through practitioner action." Put simply, it allows us to put designing at the center of our research and results in work in which video, animation, websites, and other media objects are not merely things we study but rather the reason for our exploration (Vannotti 51-60).

Finally, The CMDC Program has seen much growth and prosperity since 2006. This success is due to:

1. Keeping curriculum current with the field and engaging to students
2. Participating in all recruitment and retention events
3. Advising and mentoring students one-on-one rather than in large "town hall" approach
4. Helping students gain opportunities that lead to good careers or entry into grad school
5. Building community among students, and among students, faculty, and staff
6. Attracting and retaining highly productive faculty who are experts in their fields of research and advocate on behalf of the program and its students
7. Finding tuition support for students
8. Developing sound and meaningful partnerships within university and beyond to businesses and non-profits