GALE

TEACHING DIGITAL HISTORY WITH *GALE DIGITAL SCHOLAR LAB*
A CASE STUDY

Dr Reima Välimäki is research fellow at the University of Turku, Turku Institute for Advanced Studies and the Department of Cultural History. Research interests include the digital humanities, history of polemical speech and literature, history of repression as well as medievalism and popular history. He is responsible for the digital history module for students studying history and has taught an introduction to digital humanities both in individual lectures and in complete introductory courses.

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INTRODUCTION

The growing importance of digital humanities in academia calls for the integration of innovative tools into the curriculum. Dr Reima Välimäki, a lecturer in medieval history at the University of Turku, Finland, embraced this challenge and incorporated *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* into his Digital History course.

Välimäki explains the background to designing the course: "We had initially planned to teach in a classroom where we would pre-install several pieces of software and the students would use University computers, but coronavirus meant that we had to transfer to online delivery like almost all universities."

"What we needed was to have some kind of online workspace. As it happened, the University of Turku had a license to *Gale Digital Scholar Lab*, which when we looked at it, contained many things we were going to cover in the course, including Topic Modelling, Named Entity Recognition, and Sentiment Analysis. We decided that we would try it so that students would have access to the same version of the analysis tools and not have to deal with the issues of installing programs themselves".

"For that purpose, it worked perfectly. We had students with very, very different computer skills - some who had only basic knowledge of using office tools and browsing the Internet, to one PhD student who was learning to program her own neural networks. For those with only basic skills the *Lab* worked very well, they had no overwhelming issues of how to use the analysis tools. I'm very, very happy we used it."

COURSE DESIGN

The course ran for seven-weeks and included a lot of independent work for students, guided by introductory video lectures and accompanying reading. Hands-on experience with *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* was encouraged each week through assignments based on elements of the *Lab* workflow. This began with an introduction to basic features, followed by forming a corpus, pre-processing documents, cleaning data, and then applying tools like Named Entity Recognition, Topic Modelling or Document Clustering, before finishing with a session on data presentation.

LEARNING CENTER SUPPORT

Välimäki relied on the *Lab* Learning Center's integrated help materials to introduce students to various digital analysis methods. Students were encouraged to consult the Learning Center for additional support, allowing Välimäki to focus on guiding students through their assignments rather than troubleshooting technical issues. This support system enabled a smoother learning experience for both the students and the instructor.
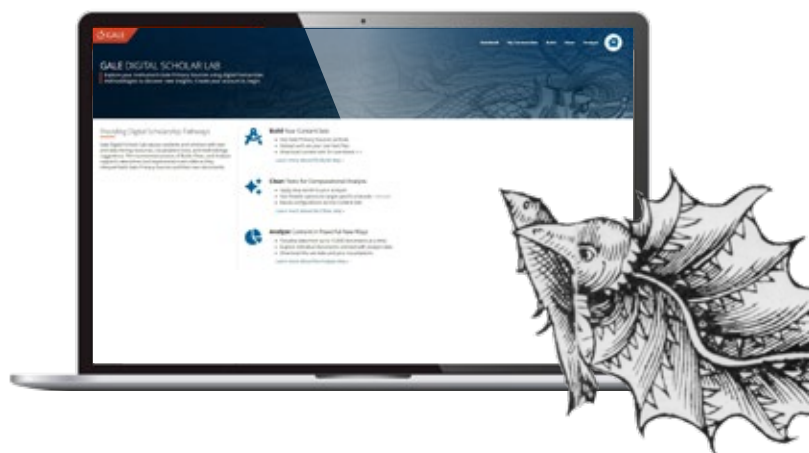
GALE PRIMARY SOURCES INTEGRATION

The course utilised *Gale Primary Sources* extensively, enabling students to access a diverse range of historical materials. Välimäki praised the metadata quality in Gale archives, stating, "I have to say I was impressed with the metadata in the Gale archives, which makes them much more useful." The integration of Gale archives allowed students to work with digital primary sources while applying the analytical tools provided by the *Lab*.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

Each week, students completed assignments that required them to apply *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* tools to *Gale Primary Sources*. Välimäki designed assignments like asking students to test the stop words list in the clean function to see how it affects the output of tools like Named Entity Recognition. Assignments required students to think critically about the digital analysis methods, ensuring they understood the implications and limitations of the tools they were using. These assignments also encouraged students to consider the best way to present their findings to an audience unfamiliar with the analysis. "They had to kind of think what information you need to give to a reader who has not done the analysis."

FUTURE COURSE OFFERINGS

In the future, the course may also be adapted for independent study and could be opened up to students from other humanities disciplines.

For the moment, the University of Turku are happy with how *Gale Digital Scholar Lab*'s user-friendly interface and extensive resources allowed students with varying levels of technical expertise to engage with digital humanities. Välimäki reported that at least one student discovered new ways to approach their MA thesis using the Lab, showcasing its potential to enhance academic research: "he's going to use the Lab tools there, maybe some other tools as well, for the sentiment analysis,"

Using *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* enabled Dr Välimäki and his colleagues to engage students from undergraduate level to PhD candidates in their Digital History course. Välimäki explains why introducing digital methods early in an academic career is so important to students: "Learning them at the latest at the Masters level is very beneficial, because they have the research tools at their disposal to use when they enter into PhDs and, of course, the job market outside of a University career."