

To: Committee on Academic Planning
From: Art History and Literature & Creative Writing Departments
Re: Joint Request for a Digital FTE
Date: March 30, 2019

Executive Summary

The ability to navigate a world in which knowledge is increasingly constituted through and mediated by images, and to participate in the technologies that define such mediations – in short, the admixture of visual literacy and digital fluency – should be understood as essential to the education of Hamilton students.

With this goal in mind, the Departments of Art History and Literature & Creative Writing seek a scholar who is broadly trained in visual studies and digital humanities. We would hope to search for this position during the 2019-20 academic year, with the appointment to begin on July 1, 2020.

Curricular Vision and Argument

We live in an environment saturated by images to a degree unprecedented in human history. As a consequence, the co-sponsors of this proposal are of the firm belief that any aspirations toward digital fluency would be incomplete without the integration of visual literacy as a core component of the engagement with digital media. From virtual and augmented reality to retinal projection; from immersive gaming to police body cameras; and from Pinterest to drone surveillance, information is, now more than ever, transmitted through digital images and visual technologies. One need only call to mind the prevalence of data visualization, facial recognition software, GIS mapping, magnetic resonance imaging, YouTube, and Google Street View to recognize the integral place of visuality in our digital world.

The question of “What is visual literacy?” was broached over a decade ago by scholars who began to think about the significance of our predominantly visual culture. Interestingly, one of their fundamental concerns revolved around the near absence of discussions about how visual practices might inform undergraduate education, about the “possibility of turning the tenor of university education, at least in part, from text-based knowledge to visuality.”¹ James Elkins asserted that “the possibility of reconceiving first-year college education so that it works on a visual model is... the most important and potentially revolutionary problem in current curricular theory,” and he sought to imagine “a kind of literacy that might serve for the entire university community, across all disciplines.”²

Though we contend that educating students in visual literacy lags behind instruction in written expression and oral communication, we also believe that it is vital to recognize that media – whether visual, linguistic, or aural – are neither perceived nor apprehended in isolation. Rather,

¹ James Elkins, ed., *Visual Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 2008), vii.

² Elkins, *Visual Literacy*, 3.

all media are mixed or hybrid, and thus require multidisciplinary critical methodological approaches. That is, the boundaries between the visual and the verbal (or other media) only become clear by looking at both sides and making them available for investigation as a general field. It is also important to note that visual and literary culture intersect with the investigation of material culture along transhistorical and transcultural axes, a fact which speaks to the inclusivity of such interests across Humanities disciplines. This understanding of Visual Studies – as a general field where the study of vision as a sensory system and visuality as a semiotic mode necessarily overlaps with other senses and other modes – bridges our two departments and motivates this joint proposal, which we believe would contribute significantly to the Humanities Division more broadly.

With this understanding, we take up Elkins’ challenge and commit to the elaboration of a curriculum that builds upon existing strengths, interests, and activities in digital pedagogy across the humanities that could provide a kind of training ground for students who are interested in visuality, visual culture, and multi-modal communication. We envision that the appointment of a digital specialist in Visual Studies would catalyze connections between courses in the Humanities division to facilitate opportunities for students to combine digital learning with a visual studies focus.

At the same time, our proposal is responding to a clearly-articulated desire on the part of students for curricular opportunities that provide exactly these kinds of learning experiences. For example, several students in this semester’s “Introduction to Visual Studies” class have identified the conspicuous need for coursework that trains students to think critically about visual communication in the digital world; most of these students come from concentrations in computer science or the natural sciences. Similarly, students concentrating in Literature are required to complete a four-course sub-concentration in one of seven defined options, one of which is Intermedia, where they often explore the nexus between word and image, and students concentrating in Creative Writing are increasingly interested in creating hybrid media. Though such courses exist, students would benefit from a clear and coherent curricular organization that might make their pursuit of these interests less complicated. The appointment of a digital specialist in Visual Studies could almost instantly help advance such opportunities.

To that end, visual studies and digital pedagogy are established growth areas for the Department of Art History, with courses such as “Introduction to Visual Studies” (cross-listed with CNMS) and “The Portrait from Pharaoh to Facebook” currently being taught this semester, and “Seeing Gender: Gender in Visual Studies” scheduled to be introduced in the next academic year. The appointment of architectural historian Ruth Lo will expand the Department’s digital expertise and course offerings, complementing the contributions to digital pedagogy by Steve Goldberg and John McEnroe. Cinema and Media Studies obviously extends this investment in visual communication, and notably includes “Introduction to Digital Humanities” within its curriculum. We should also note that, at present, two art historians and one creative writer serve on the DHi internal advisory committee; the addition of a digital specialist in Visual Studies would help coordinate and refine digital humanities projects supported by DHi.

Yet beyond this core, more than three dozen courses in the Humanities and Social Sciences include an explicit engagement with visuality and its intersection with literary and material

culture (see **Appendix A** for a full listing). Examples include Literature & Creative Writing courses such as “Ut Pictura Poesis: Contemporary Graphic Narrative,” “Modern Japan,” “The Matter of Text,” and “The Medium is the Message: Reading Poetry in Print and Manuscript 1300-1600,” as well as ANTH 347 “Visual and Media Anthropology,” all of which demonstrate a common interest in both visuality and image-text relations across historical eras and cultural geographies. However, this commonality is, for the moment, largely notional. We propose that the appointment of a digital specialist in Visual Studies holds the potential to galvanize the shared interests threaded through so many courses in the Humanities, and thus capitalize on existing strengths to develop a digital curriculum within the division – not least because the connections between the digital and the visual are so profound in contemporary culture: the overwhelming preponderance of images and data we encounter (and with which we teach) are presented digitally, from PowerPoints to social media (even “film” is now an inherently digital medium).

What is more, identifying for students a network of interrelated courses would encourage their familiarity with a consistent digital toolbox, which could be reinforced and scaffolded through repeated exposure in classes offered by various departments, thus concretizing the systematic development of digital fluency for students enrolled in humanities courses. Such courses would also provide foundations in critical methodologies that serve to support and encourage students’ interdisciplinary work.

Perhaps just as importantly, courses addressed to these issues would make a vital contribution to the Digital Hamilton initiative by situating the consideration of digital affordances within the context of the SSIH requirement. Scholars working at the intersection of art history, visual studies, and media studies have produced significant studies on the power of images and the privilege of seeing, asking fundamental questions around who gets to see/read/interpret, what, and from where. Such critically reflective bodies of scholarship examine the relationship between seeing and knowing, illuminating the ways in which visual technologies are both implicated in the uses and abuses of power and instrumental in the construction of the concepts of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The proliferation of readily consumable (and often dubiously sourced and regulated) digital images across a variety of public platforms highlights the urgency and importance of these concerns.

In light of the interests framed above, we have identified the following **student learning outcomes** as pivotal and innovative contributions to the Hamilton curriculum that would be supported through the appointment of a Digital FTE in Visual Studies:

- To increase students’ awareness of how vision, visuality, and visual images are historically, culturally, and socially constructed.
- To foster visual literacy by enhancing students’ analytic discernment of the means by which visual objects and images communicate ideas, represent processes, and transmit knowledge.
- To increase students’ digital fluency by providing training in “bridge” technologies and methods that involve digital tools, techniques, and processes of analysis and interpretation.

- To develop and refine the use of visualizations to communicate data, argument, or multimedia storytelling (analogous to oral communication and written expression).
- To provide students with opportunities to identify and negotiate the social, ethical, and economic consequences that extend from their participation in digital media environments.
- To expose students to transdisciplinary approaches to knowledge production by synthesizing critical methods from disciplines across the humanities and social sciences to generate projects that combine the exploration of text and image.

Through the acquisition of visual + digital fluency, in addition to encouraging students to become better critical consumers of images, they might also learn a range of technological skills for the production and dissemination of visual information in the digital realm. At Hamilton, such courses would directly engage College-wide priorities in interdisciplinarity, experiential learning, and foundational skills.

Position Description/Rationale

We seek a scholar who is broadly trained to consider image/text relations, materiality and material culture, and the connections between the historical past and the digital present. We would show a strong preference for candidates who are interested in working both directly from material objects and primary sources (artifacts in the Wellin Museum and Special Collections, for example) and the affordances and constraints that digital approaches and pedagogy bring to the study of these topics.

The specific curricular contributions of the hire naturally would depend upon the individual's training and expertise, but a scholar versed in visual and media studies and the digital humanities would be able, at a minimum, to teach students what we might call the "bridge" digital methods – those that translate across sub-disciplines, don't necessarily require programming, and whose value speaks quickly and visually – such as database design and content management; network analysis; data visualization; spatial mapping/GIS; 3D modeling; AR/VR; and online exhibit building. Indeed, it is common for new scholars with backgrounds in digital art history to be fully trained in these digital methods. For this reason, and for the reasons stated above regarding the aim of concretizing a visual + digital literacy curriculum, the faculty member would be appointed to the Art History Department.

Nevertheless, while we understand the usefulness of articulating the hire's expected "skill set," our concern is less to identify specific software programs that could be instrumentalized in order to realize particular assignments or projects. Rather, we would hope to have a colleague who could work with a variety of platforms – each of which offers a range of affordances that correspond to the level of difficulty in apprehending them – and then teach students and faculty colleagues alike about what platform might best serve their needs. Perhaps not every project requires ArcGIS; sometimes StoryMap works just as well and requires a fraction of the investment of time and resources. In this sense, our understanding of digital fluency has less to do with what software application one knows/can teach, and more to do with a nuanced understanding of how to match the intellectual concerns, requirements, and ambitions of a given project to the best choice (from a myriad of options) for its implementation. This is what we

intend when we say “digital methods.” Software comes and goes, such that sustainability has more to do with understanding basic methods than with developing deep expertise or facility with a single platform.

It’s also worth noting that there are important academic conversations happening in the digital humanities around the decisions to develop public scholarship using either open-source or proprietary software. For both practical and ideological reasons, many digital specialists emphasize the need to educate students about these issues and direct them to open source platforms (SketchUp vs. Maya, for example). In addition, as the reach of and emphasis on “the digital” expands, debates surrounding equity and resource consumption have become all the more critical. We would therefore expect the faculty member to be able to guide students in conversations about social responsibility, equity, and sustainability as an essential part of digital literacy, particularly at an institution as resource-privileged as Hamilton.

We anticipate that the search committee could be composed of members of the Art History Department and Literature & Creative Writing Department, the Director of the DHi, and perhaps augmented with faculty from departments or programs who have demonstrated commitments to digital research and pedagogy.

Lastly, we have appended the promotion and tenure “Guidelines for the Evaluation of Digital Scholarship in Art and Architectural History,” developed jointly by the College Art Association (the organization of record for arts professionals in North America) and the Society of Architectural Historians. This document might be used to assist with developing promotion and tenure guidelines for the appointment, in consultation with Literature & Creative Writing and the Dean’s Office.

Draft of Position Advertisement

Hamilton College invites applications for a tenure-track position of Assistant Professor of Visual Studies, beginning July 1, 2020. We seek applications from outstanding teacher-scholars working at the intersection of art history, visual studies, media studies, and digital humanities. Specialization is open; however, candidates who demonstrate a critical perspective that is both global and historical, material and digital, and whose pedagogical and research interests concentrate on the use of images in art, literature, science, or popular culture will receive the strongest consideration. The successful applicant will have knowledge of the histories, theories, methods, and current debates in digital humanities, as well as a record of research and pedagogical projects that demonstrate fluency in digital platforms and methods. The successful applicant will also be expected to conduct scholarly research and develop courses that foster critical and collaborative digital engagements across the curriculum.

We are seeking candidates who can demonstrate their experience in teaching or working with diverse student populations. Your cover letter should address the ways in which you would further the College’s goal of building a diverse educational environment.

Candidates with ABD will be considered, although candidates with a Ph.D. are preferred. The teaching load for this position is four courses the first year and five courses thereafter.

Candidates should submit materials via Interfolio at [https://secure.interfolio.com/...](https://secure.interfolio.com/) Questions regarding the search may be directed to Xxxxx Xxxxxx, Search Committee Chair, at xxxxxx@hamilton.edu. Our review of applications will begin on November 1, 2019.

Hamilton (www.hamilton.edu) is a residential liberal arts college located in upstate New York. Applicants with dual-career considerations can find other Hamilton and nearby academic job listings at www.upstatehere.org, as well as additional information at <http://bit.ly/1tAtCaB> (Opportunities for Spouses or Partners). Hamilton College is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer and is committed to diversity in all areas of the campus community. Hamilton provides domestic partner benefits. Candidates from underrepresented groups in higher education are especially encouraged to apply.

Appendix A: List of Courses with Visual Content in the Humanities and Social Sciences

ANTH 259	Digital Technology & Social Transformation
ANTH 264	Ethnography of Literacy & Visual Language
ANTH 347	Visual & Media Anthropology
CLASC 135	The Classics on Film
CLASC 250	Heroism Ancient & Modern
CLASC 320	The Romans on Film
CLASC 335	Re-Imagining the Classics
HIST 117	Capturing Light & Time: Europe in Photographs, 1815-1968
HIST 124	Silk Road
HIST 125	Black Metropolis
HIST 165	Italian Renaissance Civilization & Culture
HIST 224	Art of Empire: Vienna, 1683-1945
HIST 249	Architecture of Occupation & Resistance
HIST 366	Space, Society, & Power
LIT 115	Disability in Literature & Film
LIT 118	Food in Literature & Film
LIT 156	Shakespeare and Film
LIT 230	Bollywood Film
LIT 239	Modern Japan
LIT 254	The Matter of Text
LIT 266	US Modernisms
LIT 368	The Medium is the Message: Reading Poetry in Print and Manuscript 1300-1600
LIT 379	Transnational Feminist Frames
LIT 380	Ut Pictura Poesis: Contemporary Graphic Narrative
RELST 143	The Sacred in South Asia
RELST 145	World Films, World Faiths
RELST 150	Pop Culture/Pop Religion
RELST 215	Religion in Film
RELST 304	Religion & Media
RELST 313	Religion & Modern Art
RELST 321	Raging Gods: Scorsese & Coppola's Religious Films
RELST 331	Holocaust Literature & Films
RELST 375	Religion, Art, & Visual Culture

- RSNST 107 Revolution of the Living Word: Popular Music, Mass Film, Performance & New Media in Russia
- RSNST 169 Dreams, Visions, & Nightmares: Intro to Russian Film
- RSNST 226 Sex, Death, & Revolution: Twentieth-Century Russian Art & Literature
- RSNST 270 Heaven, Hell & the Space in Between: Devils & Deities in Russian Literature & Art
- RSNST 295 Bloodsucking as Metaphor: Vampires, Werewolves, & the Living-Dead in Myth, Literature, & Film
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- WMGST 211 Women, Gender, & Popular Culture
- WMGST 214 Queer Literature & Film

ADDENDUM

We encourage the CAP to explore the links below as a sample of the kinds of digital practices that currently define art history and visual studies.

Publications

Digital Humanities Quarterly (<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/>)

Debates in the Digital Humanities (<http://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu>)

International Journal for Digital Art History (<http://dah-journal.org>)

Digital Art History Society (<https://digitalarthistorysociety.org>)

University Programs

Duke Wired! Lab (<http://www.dukewired.org/>)

Carleton University (<https://carleton.ca/arthistory/2014/ma-concentration-digital-humanities/>)

General Introductions to Digital Art History

The Getty (<http://www.getty.edu/foundation/initiatives/current/dah/>)

UCLA Digital Art History 101 (<https://ucla-beyond-slide-library.github.io/DAH101/About.html>)

CAA Reviews “Reflections on Digital Art History” (<http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/2726>)

Digital Art History Projects

<http://imageresources.weebly.com/digital-humanities-projects.html>

Summer Instructional Institutes

National Humanities Center (<https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/education-programs/digital-humanities/>)

Berkeley (<http://dlab.berkeley.edu/blog/uc-berkeley-digital-humanities-summer-program-starts-soon>)

CUNY (<http://dhinstitutes.org/>)

April 4, 2019

Dear Adam Van Wynsberghe and members of CAP:

I am writing this letter in support of the allocation request submitted by the Art History and Literature and Creative Writing Departments for an FTE to be drawn from the pool of four digital positions at the College.

I would very much like to have a colleague on campus engaging with the question, "What is visual literacy?" Although I am not a member of either of the departments submitting the request, I have been investigating this question in coursework (Ethnography of Literacy and Visual Language; Digital Technology and Social Transformation) and in a number of journal articles concerning the use of digital technology in the surveillance of the poor in the United States, and the often mutual moves to digitize and privatize social services. I have begun a long-term project on the uses of media in entrepreneurial educational practices in Hindi and English in North India. The digital aspects of communication are also growing in salience at the journal I edit, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, and I have been helping authors to revise a growing number of articles focused in some way on digital infrastructures, practices, and interpretive frameworks. I would be most eager to have a colleague working on the relationship between digital practices and other communicative possibilities from a critical stance.

One of the most exciting aspects of the allocation proposal is the call for a scholar whose work addresses explicitly the relationship between image and language in digital production and consumption. The methodological benefits that such a scholar would bring to students would be significant, whatever the specific area of interest or concentration students might have.

I can only imagine that my students in Ethnography of Literacy and Visual Language and Digital Technology and Social Transformation would learn much from the hire in Art History and Literature and Creative Writing. I certainly would be eager to share my work with the hire and support the hire in any way I can. I can also imagine that colleagues like Mariam Durrani and Pavitra Sundar would join me.

I hope that my letter has conveyed reasons for which I read the allocation request with great interest and enthusiasm.

Sincerely,



Chaise LaDousa
Anthropology Department; Education Studies and Linguistics Programs



Adam Van Wynsberghe <avanwyns@hamilton.edu>

Art History digital position proposal

Margaret Thickstun <mthickst@hamilton.edu>

Mon, Apr 8, 2019 at 11:12 AM

To: Adam Van Wynsberghe <avanwyns@hamilton.edu>

Dear Adam--I write to inform CAP that the Literature and Creative Writing Department enthusiastically supports the proposal from Art History for a person trained in visual digital studies. We believe that a person this position would offer courses of great interest to our concentrators and would propose questions and provide disciplinary and digital training that would support critical work in our disciplines (both literary and creative) and the humanities more generally.

Katherine Terrell and I met with the art historians and assisted in the revision of their initial proposal. The rest of the department responded to the final version with acclamation.

We will not be resubmitting our digital book history proposal (even though I still really like it).

If you require further endorsement, please let me know. Thanks.--Margie

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Margaret Thickstun
Jane Watson Irwin Professor of Literature
Chair, Literature and Creative Writing
Hamilton College
[198 College Hill Road](#)
[Clinton, NY 13323](#)

To: CAP

From: S Brent Rodriguez-Plate, associate professor of religious studies, by special appointment

RE: Art History/Lit & Creative Writing proposal for digital FTE

I'm writing in support of the proposed position in visual and digital fluency. As someone who teaches multiple courses with a strong visual component, and often working between the registers of word and image, I've long believed Hamilton students need a better visual grounding. They are surrounded by images in their social lives, but they need a more nuanced understanding of how these images are created, how they affect the human sensorium, and how we might be able to produce better (dare I say more equitable) images. I believe a position like the one proposed through Art History and Literature & Creative Writing could fill a significant lacuna in our curriculum.

As a writer, I have great respect for verbal language, and work with my students to develop writing skills. But that's simply not enough for innovative industries and critical cultural stances in the twenty-first century. I believe Hamilton can at times be behind the curve as far as producing students who are skilled at critically consuming and creatively producing visual and digital media. We need more digital pedagogical projects that combine texts, images, and sounds, and more thoughtful ways to create assignments that have transferable skills beyond the Hill. As this proposal rightly considers, we don't need someone who knows specific software programs, but rather someone who can help students (and colleagues) think through and imagine ways of thinking visually and digitally.

I've been working on "visual culture" for the past 20 years now, but the visual culture of the 1990s is not the same as the 2020s. I need a software update, and so would welcome a new scholar to the college with skills that would help bring a cadre of us together from across the campus to sharpen our own visual skills, based in digital media.



Adam Van Wynsberghe <avanwyns@hamilton.edu>

letter of support

William (Bill) Salzillo <wsalzill@hamilton.edu>
To: Adam Van Wynsberghe <avanwyns@hamilton.edu>

Tue, Apr 9, 2019 at 3:05 PM

Dear Adam,

The Art Department is please to support the joint Digital FTE proposal made by the Art History and Literature Departments. We agree that there is a pressing need to provide students with the necessary critical tools to navigate the overwhelming scope of the digital landscape. "What is visual literacy?" We pose the same questions. If granted the Digital Literacy FTE position will facilitate a broader inter-disciplinary discussion on this topic specifically as well as encourage future collaborative efforts among our disciplines.

Best, Bill Salzillo



Hamilton

Classics Department

198 College Hill Road
Clinton, NY 13323

19 April 2019

To the Committee:

We write in strong support of the Digital FTE Allocation Proposal jointly submitted by the departments of Art History and Literature and Creative Writing.

As the proposal puts forth, visual literacy is vitally important in our digital age, yet “lags behind instruction in written and oral communication.” Hamilton College provides an illustrative example; at present we have a Writing Center and Oral Communication Center, as well as Writing Intensive and Speaking Intensive courses, yet there is no corollary for visual communication. The proposed line would help to fill this gap and would be a valuable addition for the Humanities division and for our students.

The proposal calls for a scholar “broadly trained to consider image/text relations, materiality and material culture, and the connections between the historical past and the digital present.” These theoretical concerns are at the core of much cutting edge scholarship across the humanities, including in Classics. Since the proposal calls for a scholar whose research and pedagogy bridge the digital present with the historical past, we believe our department stands to benefit from this hire. As the proposal notes in its appendix, our curriculum in Classics features numerous courses with visual content (including many courses not listed in the appendix). Dedicated training in processing visual culture, and in theorizing relationships between visual culture and other forms of communication, will enhance our students’ experience of our Classics curriculum.

In short, we find this proposal well-conceived and exciting, and we believe it has the potential to benefit the entire Humanities division.

Yours sincerely,

Shelley Haley, Anne Feltovich, and Jesse Weiner