

**Creating Overlapping Communities of Practice:
Digital Editing, Teaching, and Scholarship in the Hoccleve Archive**

by Robin Wharton and Elon Lang, [The Hoccleve Archive](#)

(As mentioned by Kaitlin,) I speak today on behalf of both myself and Robin Wharton, of Georgia State University. For the past 2 years, since we first met here at Kalamazoo in 2013, we have been collaborating on a long-term digital humanities project called **The Hoccleve Archive**. This archive collects together editorial projects, bibliographic data, and textual studies resources produced by scholars of the fifteenth-century London poet, Thomas Hoccleve. Rather than just serving as a repository, though, we are designing the Archive to serve as a platform for developing new critical, digital, multimodal editions of Hoccleve's works using the resources it preserves. These editions will interface with detailed linguistic data, manuscript images, audio files containing readings of Hoccleve's poems, text transcriptions derived from legacy formats, searchable databases, and scholarly concordances that are being built in and for the Archive. We hope that the tools and collaborative methods we develop to work with Hoccleve's literary corpus can be reapplied to large-scale, low-budget archival and editorial projects on other authors and texts, and in other fields.

A major reason why we are developing the Archive with a vision for long-term community collaboration is because we are facing challenges as professionals that are endemic among our "nexté generacioun" of medievalist and humanities scholars. Like a growing number of our colleagues, we are working off the tenure track as Lecturers at our respective institutions. And despite the fact that medieval studies continues to be a major research focus for both of us,

we do not generally teach courses in it. By almost every metric counting the success of English Ph.D.'s, however, we are actually very fortunate. Our appointments are full-time, and our public Universities have resources for research that are accessible by faculty and staff at almost all levels of employment. Our access to these resources is simply based on different criteria than our tenured and tenure-track colleagues. Our Universities perceive our work to be part of their pedagogical rather than research missions. At Georgia State, for example, Robin supervises a team of graduate student assistants whose work on the Hoccleve Archive is funded through a program to develop research projects that further undergraduate pedagogy at GSU. And at UT, I can apply to my College for small travel grants available exclusively to lecturers for presenting pedagogically-themed papers at conferences.

So, in order to pursue our research programs actively, we have had to reshape them. We think a lot of us will have to do this with increased urgency and effectiveness in the next half-century. As institutions reimagine their teaching and research priorities in the humanities in the face of financial and public pressures, we are attempting to demonstrate how teaching and research can work together. And we believe the Hoccleve Archive--and perhaps even the field of medieval studies more generally--stands to benefit from this pressure to re-fashion scholarly identities and project goals around a dual mission. Teaching with the Archive--along with a variety of other activities such as social media participation, public intellectualism, and "building" or "making"--can be articulated within medieval studies as a form of scholarship, informed by and contributing to the same theoretical and methodological foundation that guides more traditional scholarly work. Further, within what are already richly interdisciplinary fields of inquiry (i.e. medieval studies and digital humanities), we are doing work on our project in as

interdisciplinary a manner as possible. With graduate and undergraduate students, we are building *overlapping communities of practice* between computer science and medieval studies, breaking down the notoriously sturdy disciplinary silos that segregate the STEM fields and the humanities. Like our colleagues in the natural sciences who staff research labs with student apprentices, we see digital humanities projects as *labs* for humanities research and students at any level as our collaborators. In one of our long-term goals for the Hoccleve Archive, we want to extend this metaphor to create classroom digital editing laboratories with an open access platform for editing Hoccleve's long poem, *The Regiment of Princes*. A full variorum edition of this poem has never been completed, so student participants and their professors would contribute meaningful collations, transcriptions, annotations, and mark-up to this edition. In turn students would learn paleography, Middle English prosody, and metadata standards. With such a community-sourcing model, we hope the Hoccleve Archive can enable collaborations that bridge the divide between teaching and scholarship, experts and amateurs, and readers and author-editors.

In order to accomplish these longer-term goals, however, we need access to internal and external funding for technical development, in addition to emerging and still relatively limited resources dedicated to teaching. And, that's where we have run into obstacles. **[First the good news:]** Based on some of the feedback we have received on unsuccessful grant proposals, there is interest among funding agencies and programs in projects that seek to apply digital humanities tools and methods to develop innovative undergraduate pedagogy. Further, while conventional definitions of "proper scholarship" in review, promotion, and tenure processes may make tenure-line faculty and even alt-ac researchers hesitant to take on pedagogically-focused projects,

these are exactly the type of research projects our institutions encourage us to pursue as lecturers. **Nevertheless [and here's the bad news]**, in spite of the fact that lecturers in our position are in many ways ideally situated for this kind of pedagogically-focused digital humanities work, our non-tenure-track faculty status is a *liability* in grant applications. Why? Reviewers presume that we are not permanent, that we don't have a say in university governance, and, despite quite a bit of evidence to the contrary, that there's no support within our institutions to sustain long-term projects headed by non-tenure track faculty.

We are not saying that outdated cultural assumptions about who does "Research" (with a capital "R") within universities is the only or even the primary reason we've been unsuccessful in the competition for external funding. We have, however, seen these assumptions expressed in written comments from reviewers, and they are still tacitly and explicitly acknowledged by many scholars working in digital humanities, medieval studies, and the humanities more broadly. While this obstacle is largely a rhetorical one involving the management of cultural perceptions, it is a not one faced by tenure-track faculty. It's an obstacle that we are working to overcome with three primary strategies. (1) accomplish incremental goals with the limited time and resources we have. Our digital edition of poetry from Hoccleve's holograph manuscripts is the first major deliverable -- which you can check out by scanning the QR code on this little handout, (2) demonstrate that our work on the Hoccleve Archive is both effective interdisciplinary pedagogy, and innovative interdisciplinary research, and (3) encourage our colleagues in forums like this one to reexamine the conventional divisions of labor in the world of humanities research. We also, of course, hope to chip away at outdated assumptions simply by

demonstrating to our colleagues that--whether on or off the tenure track--our institutions value our work in teaching and research enough to promote us. **[Hopefully!]**

Based on our admittedly limited experience, we would like to offer a couple working conclusions about how medieval studies scholars ought to make our way through the next 50 years. **First**, rather than clinging to a nostalgic vision of the university of days gone by, we should instead be attuned to how the various conditions in which we all labor shape our contributions to our institutions and our discipline. The focus of our advocacy should be for living wages and fair employment conditions for every employee at every level of every university, not preserving or imposing one-size-fits all R1 tenure-track models throughout the academy. Full-time, career-track, enfranchised, non-TT faculty positions can offer benefits over both contingent, sessional adjunct jobs *and* more traditional tenure lines for scholars who, like us, are interested in digital humanities scholarship that blurs the line between teaching and research. **Second**, we must acknowledge the digital humanities will not *save* medieval studies from waning student enrollment or institutional divestment. Nor will the digital humanities automatically result in the sort of interdisciplinary and inter-hierarchical communities of practice that we have found make projects like the Hoccleve Archive possible. **Rather**, we must be on the lookout for new ways to make the different and often competing energies in our professions overlap.

Finally, opening medieval studies to the full potential of the digital humanities will greatly expand the audiences for and multiply the methods in which we conduct our scholarship. We should embrace the opportunity this will offer us to reconsider--and perhaps even

abandon--the historically contingent disciplinary boundaries and institutional hierarchies that currently determine what medieval studies scholarship looks like and who gets to do it.