Statement of Purpose

UCL · Digital Humanities MA

Fictional applicant and experience · Vappingo editing demonstration

A woman came to our archive looking for a recording of her father. She had been told it was in the collection, but our new search system returned nothing. I ~~am applying~~ remembered scanning a handwritten index card that seemed to match his name, so I checked the original index. Two letters of his surname had been entered incorrectly. Once we corrected them, she found the recording. We had worked to make the archive easier to search, yet a small transcription error had made something deeply personal almost impossible to find. That experience gave me a question I now want to pursue through UCL's Digital Humanities ~~MA at UCL because I want~~ MA: how can archives make collections searchable without allowing mistakes in their data to ~~develop my interest in history and~~ hide the ~~use of technology in archives. During my History degree, I have become interested in how digital collections can make historical material available to more people. I particularly enjoy working with primary sources, and I think that combining historical research with digital methods is an important direction for me. My longer-term aim is to work in a museum or archive, potentially specialising in digital collections.~~people they preserve?

My undergraduate dissertation ~~examined experiences of~~ explored migration and work in a former dock district between the 1960s and 1990s. I ~~used~~ compared oral-history interviews, local newsletters and council papers to understand how residents described changes to the area. ~~I was interested in~~ The differences between ~~the~~ official records and people's ~~own accounts. Some of~~ accounts were especially revealing. But locating the interviews ~~were difficult to find because their~~ was not straightforward: broad catalogue descriptions ~~used broad terms rather than~~ often omitted the names ~~or~~ and places ~~discussed~~ mentioned in the recordings. ~~This sometimes meant spending a lot of~~ I spent considerable time ~~looking~~ searching through material that ~~turned out not~~ appeared relevant but was not. That experience made me more attentive to ~~be relevant.~~the influence of cataloguing decisions on historical research.

~~I also took an~~ An optional digital history ~~course, which~~ course introduced me to ~~working with~~ organising historical ~~information~~ sources in spreadsheets and using basic programming. For one assignment, I taught myself enough Python to clean a table of interview dates and names ~~for a class assignment. At first, I was mainly trying to save time, because I had made several~~ after making errors when organising the data ~~manually. The~~ by hand. I had approached the task ~~helped me understand that digital methods~~ as a way to save time; I came away more interested in how inconsistent records affect the evidence researchers can ~~be useful in historical research, but~~ use. My technical skills are still at an early stage, and I ~~still~~ want to develop them

alongside the source criticism I have ~~a great deal to learn about the technical side.~~learned through my History degree.

Last ~~year~~ year, I ~~spent~~ worked part-time for a term ~~working part-time with~~ at a small community archive that was digitising its collection of recorded interviews. I ~~helped scan~~ scanned handwritten index cards, ~~enter information~~ entered details into a spreadsheet and ~~check~~ checked records as they ~~were~~ moved into a ~~new~~ searchable catalogue. Some ~~of the index~~ cards were difficult to ~~read,~~ decipher, and ~~there were differences in spelling~~ names appeared with different spellings or formats across the collection. Seeing the archive become more accessible was rewarding, but the work also showed me how much judgement goes into seemingly routine decisions about names and ~~the way people had been recorded over time. I enjoyed this work and liked seeing how a collection that had mostly been used by regular visitors could become easier to search.~~descriptions.

~~One incident during~~ The visitor's search made those concerns more immediate. We could correct her father's record because she knew what she was looking for and I happened to remember the ~~placement has remained with me. A woman came~~ card. I began to ~~the archive~~ wonder how many other recordings were still difficult to find ~~a recording~~ because nobody had yet identified the error. A catalogue can appear complete while leaving parts of ~~her father. A relative had told her the archive had it, but the new search system returned no result for his name. I remembered scanning a handwritten index card that appeared to refer to the recording, so I went back to the paper index. Two letters of his surname had been misread when the information was entered into the catalogue. After we corrected the entry, she was able to find the recording. I realised how important accurate data entry was, especially when records contain personal information.~~its collection effectively invisible.

~~Following that~~ After the incident, I helped ~~look through~~ review a small group of names in the catalogue ~~to find~~ for spelling differences that ~~might~~ could affect searches. ~~I used the Python~~ Using techniques from my ~~course to flag~~ Python course, I flagged possible variants in a ~~spreadsheet, and~~ spreadsheet; the archivist then checked them against the original cards. ~~It~~ The exercise was ~~a fairly simple exercise~~ limited, and we did not ~~assess~~ measure its impact formally. ~~Nevertheless,~~ Even so, it ~~made me interested in whether transcription problems happen frequently in other digitised collections and how institutions identify them.~~ raised a question I would like to ~~explore this question further through~~ investigate in postgraduate ~~study.~~study: which kinds of transcription and metadata errors most affect whether people can locate historical recordings, and how might archives identify them systematically?

At UCL, I ~~hope~~ want to develop ~~stronger~~ the technical and research skills ~~and gain a better theoretical understanding of digital humanities. I am particularly interested in the~~ to examine that question rigorously. Digital Humanities Research Methods ~~module and the option to study~~

would help me design an investigation rather than rely on isolated examples, while Introduction to ~~Digitisation.~~ Digitisation would deepen my understanding of decisions made when physical records become digital ones. I am also interested in Natural Language Processing and Text ~~Analysis also sounds relevant to~~ Analysis, particularly the ~~problems I have seen, as~~ potential and limitations of methods for identifying inconsistencies in textual records. For my dissertation, I would like to ~~learn more about methods for working with textual records. I am attracted to UCL's reputation, the interdisciplinary nature of the course and the opportunities to learn from people with different academic backgrounds. For my dissertation, I may examine~~ investigate how ~~mistakes~~ errors in digitised catalogue ~~records~~ entries affect access to ~~community history.~~a community-history collection. UCL's interdisciplinary approach would allow me to connect that work to the historical and ethical questions that first drew me to the field.

After the MA, I ~~would like~~ hope to ~~join the~~ work in digital collections ~~team~~ at a ~~museum,~~ museum or public ~~archive or another cultural organisation. I want~~ archive, helping to ~~be able to contribute to decisions about~~ shape how records are digitised, checked and made searchable. I ~~am also interested in future research, although I~~ would ~~first~~ like to gain ~~more~~ practical ~~experience.~~ experience before deciding whether to pursue further research. My History degree has taught me to pay attention to what sources reveal and what they leave out; I now want the technical training to ask the same questions of the systems used to find those sources. The woman who came to our archive ~~placement have given me a useful starting point, and~~ knew her father's recording was there. I ~~believe UCL would provide~~ want to help make sure the next ~~stage of training I need. I would welcome the chance~~ person looking for a family history does not have to ~~study the subject in greater depth and develop skills that are relevant to the cultural heritage sector.~~rely on someone remembering an index card.