Using Villanova's *Confessions* App in a Digital Pedagogy Context: A Student Feedback Report from MacEwan University

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In the Winter semester of the 2016-2017 academic year, I taught a senior-level, thirteen-student seminar on theories of time in the ancient world. At the heart of this course (HIST 476) was a sustained, close reading of Augustine's *Confessions*, which took up about four weeks of class time. Although this was a 400-level course, deep student familiarity with the text could not be assumed in advance. (Would that we had something equivalent to the Augustine & Culture Seminar!) On account of this, I thought it would be extremely helpful to bring in an extra pedagogical resource to help students along. The Augustine's *Confessions* app, a creation of Villanova University, struck me as the best tool for the job.

Part of my mandate here at MacEwan University is to add some digital humanities flavour to our department. While I appreciate all of the great work being done on the research and data-mining side of things, my preferred path runs through digital pedagogies. Such an approach has allowed me to engage students with ancient texts by way of twenty-first-century methods, without necessarily overwhelming them with coding or data-processing demands. In this context, the *Confessions* app proved extremely helpful. Students could download it for a relatively nominal cost, then use it as they chose over the course of the semester. Being able to pull up an app on their phone that would actually help them work through Augustine's admittedly challenging masterwork was an opportunity most students really appreciated.

Since some students may not always be so eager to engage with digital resources, I crafted an assignment aimed at nudging them in that direction. Asking students to compose a short reflection on what role the app played in their own comprehension of Augustine, the assignment brought out a wide range of responses. Most, I'm happy to report, were positive. The ability to listen to readings of Augustine on the go was especially prized by certain students, especially those who were working long hours and raising families. Having glosses of difficult passages available at the click of a button also seems to have worked wonders. On the flip side, some issues did emerge, such as the disconnect between the English translation used by the app and the version we were using (Carolyn J.B. Hammond's recent Loeb rendition). Taken in sum, however, the positives do appear to have outweighed the negatives by a solid margin.

Below you will find a number of relevant documents offered in support of this brief report. These include: the course syllabus; a copy of the feedback form used; a quantitative summary of student feedback; sample student responses; and a longer-form student presentation on the place of digital resources (especially the *Confessions* app) in today's classroom. I hope that at least some of these data will be of use to you as you continue to perfect your already formidable offerings. As already noted above, I have to say that it was a pleasure giving students the chance to engage with Augustine's work in a fresh way. While I still have some kinks to work out in my own approach to digital pedagogy, I would not hesitate to recommend your app to students again in the future.

Course Syllabus

MacEwan UNIVERSITY | **DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES**

Topics in Ancient & Medieval History: *Time in Antiquity*
HIST 476 – AS01
Winter 2017

Instructor:	Sean Hannan, PhD
Office:	7-352H
Phone:	780-633-3914
E-mail:	hannans@macewan.ca
Office Hours:	R 11:00 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Lecture Time:	R 3:30 – 6:20 p.m.
Lecture Room:	7-355
Course Credits:	3

Course Pre-requisite: A minimum grade of C- in 6 credits of 200- or 300-level history courses, and a minimum grade of C- in ancient history courses (CLAS 210, CLAS 314, CLAS 315) or courses as determined by the department.

Course Description:

In this seminar, students discuss, critique, and analyse readings on a selected topic in ancient or medieval history. They also prepare a major research paper on an issue related to the seminar topic. The topic in any given year is selected by the instructor.

In this rendition of HIST 476, we will excavate the diversified field of ideas about time that once circulated throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. Readings will center on the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Augustine of Hippo. Using methods drawn from both intellectual and cultural history, we will carve out a place for these texts within their respective religious, philosophical, and political contexts. Nevertheless, we should let these ancient sources break free of their contexts at times, so that they can challenge us to reflect on our own preconceptions about what time is. Along the way, we will pause to ask ourselves: What did the ancients mean when they talked about "time?" Were past, present, and future all held to be equally real in

antiquity? And how do these debates about temporality relate to the historian's goal of overcoming the vast distances of historical time in order to say something true about the past?

Course Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

> Find, identify, and analyse documentary evidence related to conceptions of time in antiquity.
> Critique and analyse significant schools of interpretation in Social, Political, Economic, and Intellectual History.
> Discuss, critique, and analyse historical writing on a selected topic.
> Write an analytical essay of advanced depth and clarity.
> Display a firm familiarity with theories of time and history as they were formulated in the ancient and early medieval worlds.
> Converse intelligently about ideas of time that arose in Greek, Roman, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim thought.
> Appreciate the subtle relationship between religion and philosophy in the intellectual history of Europe, the Middle East, and the wider Mediterranean world.
> Articulate a sense of historiographical awareness about the definitions of time and philosophies of history assumed by the historian.
> Reflect on the role played by historical narrative in shaping the categories of temporal experience, both in antiquity and today.
> Explain challenging but methodologically crucial terms like "historiography," "philosophy of history," and "historical consciousness."

Textbooks and Other Learning Resources:

Augustine. *Confessions* (Loeb 26-27). 2 volumes. Trans. Carolyn J.B. Hammond. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2016.

In addition, students will be invited to make use of digital learning tools when appropriate. Two such resources are especially recommended:

- The *Confessions* Mobile App
  - Developed by the fine folks at Villanova University (just outside Philadelphia), the *Confessions* app allows users to easily peruse Augustine's *Confessions* on any of their mobile devices. The goal of the project is to provide each passage in the text with helpful, hyperlinked annotations, which are provided by scholars who specialize in Augustine's works. I have contacted the makers of the app at Villanova, and they have a great interest in hearing about how we fare with their digital learning technology.
  - http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/unit/MobileComputing/VillanovaMobileApps/augustine-s-confessions.html

- The *History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps* Podcast
  - For students who need a bit of a leg up with some of the more philosophical readings, I would recommend listening to Peter Adamson's podcast on the history of philosophy. Adamson is a reputable, distinguished scholar of both philosophy in general and medieval Islamic thought in particular. Students will be able to hit the ground running with many of our texts by listening to some of his episodes on their commute or on the treadmill.
  - http://www.historyofphilosophy.net/

Please also note that many of our texts are drawn from the Loeb Classical Library, which can be accessed easily online via the MacEwan Library website. Simply type "Loeb Classical Library" into the catalog search bar and you will be able to click through to these texts. Please also note, however, that it is best to purchase the Augustine text in hard copy.

Other, shorter readings will be made available via our Blackboard site for this course. They will be drawn from the following monographs, collections, and journals:

Aristotle. *Physics I-IV* (Loeb 228). Trans. P.H. Wicksteed & F.M. Cornford. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1929, 1957.
Augustine. *The City of God VIII-XI* (Loeb 413). Trans. David Wiesen. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1968.
———. *The City of God XII-XV* (Loeb 414). Trans. Philip Levine. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1966.
Augustinian Studies (journal).
Hadot, Pierre, with Arnold I. Davidson & Jeannie Carlier. *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*. Trans. Marc Djaballah. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.
History and Theory (journal).
Jaritz, Gerhard, & Gerson Moreno-Riaño. *Time and Eternity: the Medieval Discourse*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2003.
Löwith, Karl. *Meaning in History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949.
Lucretius. *On the Nature of Things* (Loeb 181). Trans. W.H.D. Rouse; Rev. Martin F. Smith. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1924 (1975).
Maimonidean Studies (journal).
Marcus Aurelius. *Meditations* (Loeb 58). Trans. C.H. Haines. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1916.
Plato. *Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles* (Loeb 234). Trans. R.G. Bury. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1929.
Plotinus. *Enneads III* (Loeb 442). Trans. A.H. Armstrong. Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1967.
Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Volume I. Trans. David Pellauer & Kathleen McLaughlin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
Simplicius. *Corollaries on Place and Time*. Trans. J.O. Urmson. Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 1992.
Sorabji, Richard. *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-600 A.D.: A Sourcebook*. Volume 2: Physics. Ithaca NY: Cornell UP, 2005.
———. *Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse & Historical Representation*.
        Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.

Grade Evaluation:

Participation	20%
Blog Posts	20%
Seminar Presentation	20%
Research Paper	40%
	100%

Assignment Dates:

Blog Posts: Rolling deadlines distributed over the course of the semester.
Seminar Presentations: Rolling deadlines distributed over the course of the semester.
Research Paper (approx. 3500 words): Finals period (Thursday, April 13).

Assignment Descriptions:

Seminar Presentations: By the end of the year, students will have been asked to present their critical reflections on our assigned readings to their peers. Presentations should aim to last for twenty minutes, although that time-frame may fluctuate based on class enrollment. They may take the form of a prepared set of remarks or a digital presentation (via PowerPoint, Prezi, or another appropriate medium). Their focus should be on a theme from our readings that is relevant to the research the student is pursuing for their research paper.

Blog Posts: As part of this course, we will be building up a class blog, which will most likely be hosted via the instructor's own research site. This should make things more exciting than if students were only uploading their thoughts onto Blackboard. Students will be asked to contribute (at least) two posts to our collective blog. At the end of the semester, the most helpful posts will be selected for presentation at MacEwan's common undergraduate research day. These posts will consist of about 300-500 words and take the following forms:

> *Post 1 – Podcast Review*: Write a review of one of the episodes of Peter Adamson's *History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps*. It is perhaps easiest, thought not mandatory, to choose an episode that dovetails with what we are reading in class.

> *Post 2 – Confessions App Reflection*: Write a piece reflecting on Augustine's *Confessions* in light of the critical glosses included in Villanova's *Confessions* app. This can take the form of a research reappraisal or a critical counterargument, but it must also reflect on the pedagogical use of digital technology in the classroom.

Research Paper: At the end of the semester, students will submit a research paper (of about 3500 words) on a time-related topic of their choosing. While the choice of sub-topic is free, it must fall within the historical and thematic realm of our course. It must also be made known to the instructor well in advance of the paper's due date. Students should make their selection of a theme clear during meetings with the instructor during office hours.

Final Grade:

The official grading system at MacEwan University is the 12-point letter grade system. While instructors may use percentages to aid in their grade development, percentages are not part of MacEwan University's official grading system. Policy C2020: Grading.

Grade	Percentage	Grade Point	Descriptor
A+	96-100	4.0	Outstanding
A	88-95	4.0	Excellent
A-	82-87	3.7	
B+	78-81	3.3	
B	74-77	3.0	Good
B-	71-73	2.7	
C+	66-70	2.3	
C	63-65	2.0	Satisfactory
C-	58-62	1.7	
D+	53-57	1.3	Poor
D	48-52	1.0	
F	0-47	0.0	Fail

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

Students are expected to be aware of their academic responsibilities as outlined in Policy E3101: Student Rights and Responsibilities. Policies are available online at MacEwan.ca/policymanual.

1. **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Policy C1000: Academic Integrity. All incidents of academic dishonesty, as outlined in the policy, are reported and recorded by the Academic Integrity Office.

2. **SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS:** Policy E3400: Student with Disabilities. Students who require special accommodation in this course due to a disability are advised to discuss their needs with Services to Students with Disabilities (SSD).

3. **PREREQUISITES:** Students who do not have the appropriate prerequisite may be removed from the course and may be responsible for any tuition costs up to the date of removal.

4. **FINAL EXAMS**: Policy C2005: Final Assessment and Policy C2020: Grading. Students are responsible for confirming the date, time, duration and location of the final exam. Students may apply for a deferred final exam to the Faculty of Arts and Science Program Services Office. **Applications must be received within two business days of the final exam** ($50 per exam to a maximum of $100 per scheduled exam period).

5. **APPEALS:** Policy E3103: Student Appeals. Students may contact Student Affairs for assistance.

INSTRUCTOR COURSE POLICIES:

Students must communicate with their instructors using their myMacEwan email accounts.

1. **Late penalties/policy:** Students must submit all assignments by the stated deadlines in order to for their grade to receive full consideration. Late submissions will have their grades docked at a rate of 5% per day. No assignments will be accepted more than one week after their stated deadline. Exceptions may be made in the case of compelling medical circumstances. In that case, it will be necessary to provide documentation in the form of a doctor's note.

2. **Attendance:** Attendance at and attention during class are expected of all students in this course. Failure to attend will put students at a disadvantage when it comes to understanding the material and succeeding with their assignments. This is especially true of in-class presentations!

3. **Use of Digital Resources:** While it will be a goal of this course to encourage students to use digital tools and resources to further their study of the ancient and medieval worlds, we must be careful not to rush too quickly into our use of online sources. Before you rely on an online source for academic use, please ensure that that source is academically reliable. That means: it is not to okay to cite Wikipedia in your research paper, but it may be useful to consult online maps and sources posted by other faculty or universities. (Hint: Look for websites ending in .edu!) There is a lot of nonsense written about history on the internet; our goal will be to dilute the intensity of that nonsense, rather than adding to it.

DISCLAIMER:
The information in this course outline is subject to change and any changes will be announced in class or in writing.

COURSE TOPICS AND SCHEDULE

[Note: (BB) means that the readings will be made available on our Blackboard course site.]

Week 1: Introduction to Thinking About Time Historically
      (Thursday, January 5)
      Readings:
      None, but we will discuss short Pre-Socratic fragments relating to time.

Week 2: Approaching the History of Time
      (Thursday, January 12)
      Readings:
      Momigliano, "Time in Ancient Historiography," *History & Theory* 6 (1966), 1-23. (BB)
      Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 1-19 ("Introduction"). (BB)
      Sorabji, *Time, Creation, & the Continuum [TCC]*, Intro & "Is Time Real?," 1-16. (BB)

White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *The Content of the Form*, 1-25. (BB)

Week 3: The Cosmic Shape of Time in Plato
    (Thursday, January 19)
    Readings:
    Plato, *Timaeus*. (Selections will be posted on BB, but students are encouraged to read the entire work in order to glean the full context.)
    Osborne, "Space, Time, Shape, and Direction: Creative Discourse in the *Timaeus*," in Gill & McCabe, eds., *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 179-212. (BB)
    Sorabji, *TCC*, "Plato's *Timaeus*," 268-276. (BB)

Week 4: The Physics of Time in Aristotle
    (Thursday, January 26)
    Readings:
    Aristotle, *Physics*, Book IV.x-xiii. (BB)
    Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators*, "Change," 61-69. (BB)
    Sorabji, *TCC*, "Static & Flowing" & "Time-Atoms," 46-51, 365-383. (BB)

Week 5: The Presence of Time in Epicurean & Stoic Texts
    (Thursday, February 2)
    Readings:
    Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* (selections). (BB)
    Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Books I-IV. (BB)
    Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, 162-174. (BB)

Week 6: Time Versus Eternity in Neo-Platonic Thought
    (Thursday, February 9)
    Readings:
    Plotinus, *Enneads*, III.vii. (BB)
    Sorabji, *TCC*, "Is Eternity Timeless?," 98-130. (BB)

Week 7: Augustine & 'Christian Time'
    (Thursday, February 16)
    Readings:
    Augustine, *Confessions*, Books I-IV.
    Paul, Philippians & 1 Corinthians. (cf. Bible Gateway: https://www.biblegateway.com/)

Week 8: NO CLASS!
    (Thursday, February 23)
    Reading Break!

Week 9: Augustine in the Context of Intellectual History
    (Thursday, March 2)

Readings:
Augustine, *Confessions*, Books V-IX.
Byers, "Augustine on the 'Divided Self:' Platonist or Stoic?" *Augustinian Studies* 38, no.
        1 (2007): 105-118. (BB)

Week 10: Augustine on Time & Memory
        (Thursday, March 9)
        Readings:
        Augustine, *Confessions*, Books X-XIII.
        Ricoeur, P., *Time & Narrative* I, 5-30 ("Aporias of the Experience of Time"). (BB)

Week 11: Augustine and 'Christian (Historical) Times'
        (Thursday, March 16)
        Readings:
        Augustine, *City of God* XI & XIV. (BB)
        Löwith, *Meaning in History*, 160-190 ("Augustine," "Orosius," & "Biblical View"). (BB)

Week 12: Time between Antiquity and the Middle Ages
        (Thursday, March 23)
        Readings:
        Simplicius, *Corollary on Time*, 85-124. (BB)
        Sorabji, *Commentators*, "Infinity," "Time," and "Eternity," 189-225. (BB)

Week 13: Questions about Time in Jewish and Muslim Sources
        (Thursday, March 30)
        Readings:
        Rudavsky, "The theory of time in Maimonides and Crescas," *Maimonidean Studies* 1
                (January 1990), 143-162. (BB)
        Maccoby, "Crescas's Concept of Time," in Jarity & Moreno-Riano, eds., *Time and
                Eternity: The Medieval Discourse* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 163–170. (BB)
         Sorabji, *Time, Creation & the Continuum*, "Islamic Occasionalism" & "Islamic
                Atomism," 297-306, 384-402. (BB)

Week 14: Final Reflections & Presentations
        (Thursday, April 6)

Sample Feedback Form

<u>Digital Humanities Feedback</u>

Instructions: Please take the final minutes of class to fill out this evaluation of your digital humanities assignments (i.e. the Podcast Review and *Confessions* App Reflection). Doing so will help me, the Humanities Department, and MacEwan University as a whole to improve instruction for both yourselves and the broader student populace. This evaluation is anonymous, so please feel free to share your thoughts as you see fit. Thank you for taking the time to respond.

1. Overall, I found completing the digital humanities assignments to be:
    a. Educational
    b. Confusing
    c. Pointless
    d. None of the Above
2. Before the digital humanities assignments, my sense of the digital humanities was:
    a. Quite Good, Actually
    b. Limited & Incomplete
    c. Non-Existent
3. These assignments improved my grasp of what "digital humanities" means:
    a. True
    b. False
4. The difficulty-level of the digital humanities assignments was:
    a. Too Hard
    b. Too Easy
    c. Just Right
5. If these kinds of assignments required deeper engagement with digital resources, that would:
    a. Be More Fun
    b. Be Too Burdensome
    c. Not Change Anything
6. What is your attitude about the idea of the "digital humanities" generally?
    a. It Was a Refreshing Change
    b. It Sounded Easier But I Didn't Really Get Much Out of It
    c. I Would Prefer to Just Write a One-Page Reading Response
7. Which digital humanities assignment did you find most useful?
    a. Podcast Review
    b. App Reflection
    c. Neither Were Useful
8. How did listening to a podcast episode compare to an in-class lecture on the same material?
    a. Listening to a Podcast is Preferable
    b. Listening to an In-Class Lecture is Preferable
    c. Both Are About Equally Effective
9. What did access to the *Confessions* app change about your approach to the text itself?
    a. The App's Resources Helped Me Understand Augustine Better
    b. The App Was Cool But Didn't Really Help Me Understand Augustine That Much Better
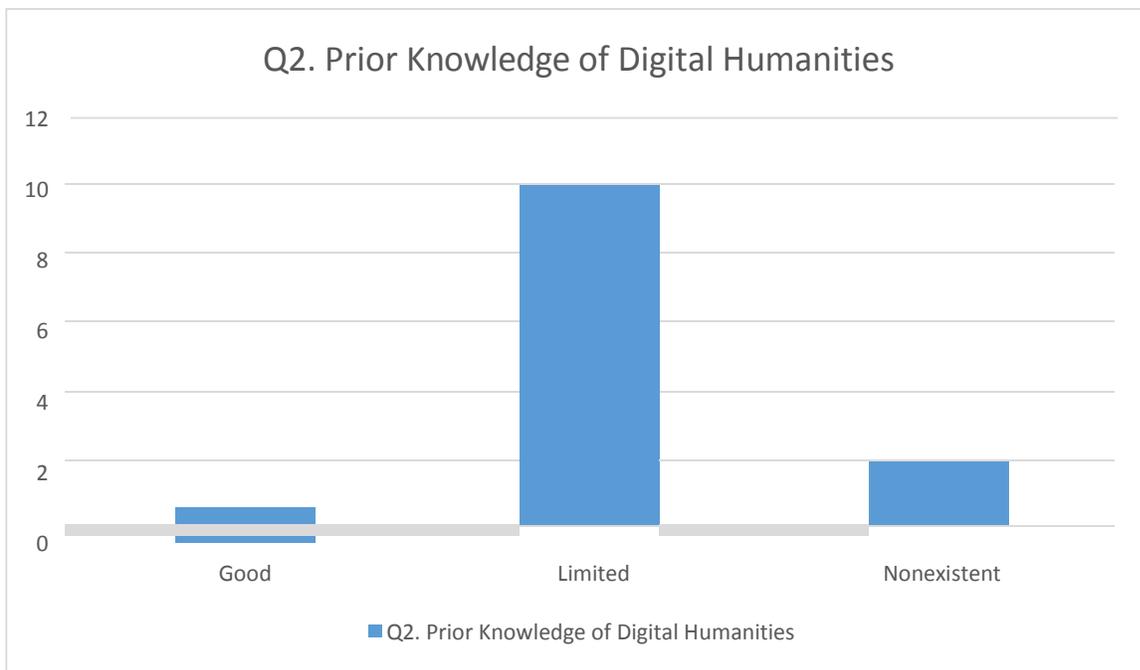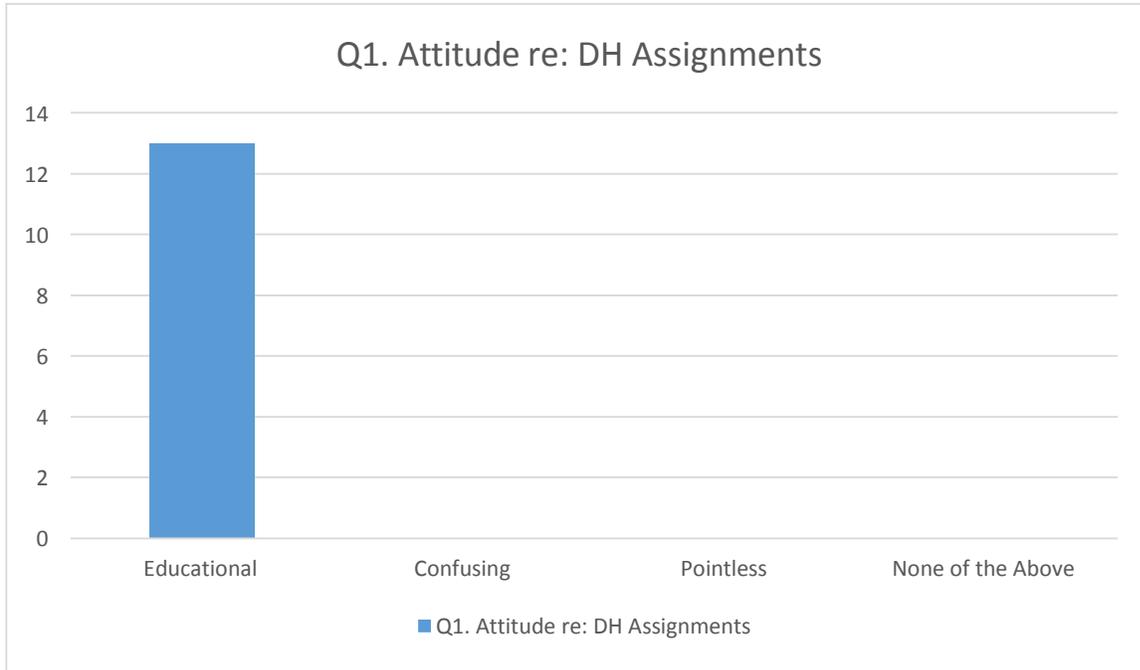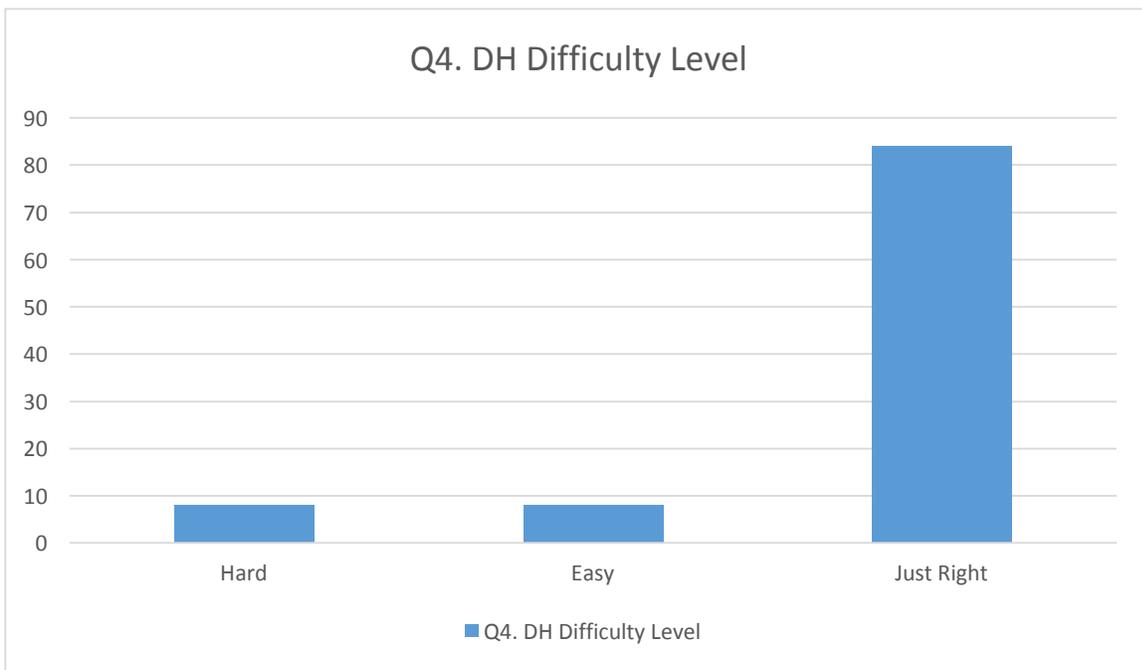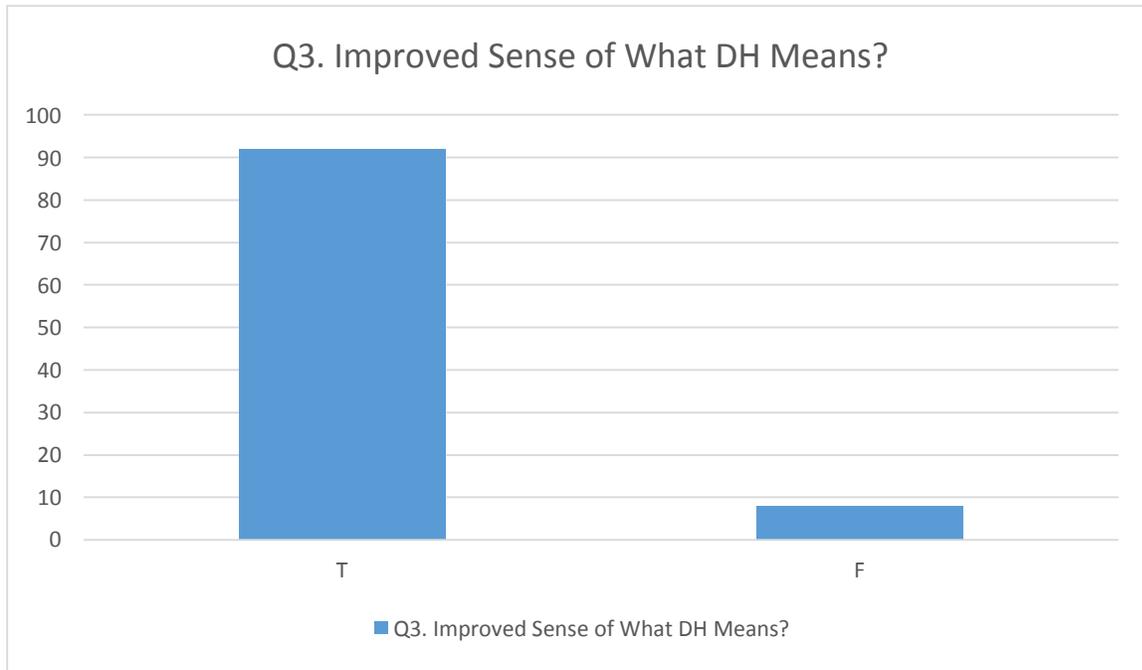   c. The App In No Way Aided My Understanding of Augustine

10. If you could pass any advice on to Dr. Peter Adamson, proprietor of the *History of Philosophy* podcast, what would it be?

11. If you could pass any advice on to the team at Villanova University that made the *Confessions* app, what would it be?

12. Do you have any ideas about other digital resources that you'd like to use when completing assignments in a Humanities context?

Thanks again!

Student Feedback Quantified

1. Overall, I found completing the digital humanities assignments to be:
   a. **Educational: 13/13 = 100%**
   b. Confusing: 0/13 = 0%
   c. Pointless: 0/13 = 0%
   d. None of the Above: 0/13 = 0%
2. Before the digital humanities assignments, my sense of the digital humanities was:
   a. Quite Good, Actually: 1/13 = 8%
   b. **Limited & Incomplete: 10/13 = 77%**
   c. Non-Existent: 2/13 = 15%
3. These assignments improved my grasp of what "digital humanities" means:
   a. **True: 12/13 = 92%**
   b. False: 1/13 = 8%
4. The difficulty-level of the digital humanities assignments was:
   a. Too Hard: 1/13 = 8%
   b. Too Easy: 1/13 = 8%
   c. **Just Right: 11/13 = 84%**
5. If these kinds of assignments required deeper engagement with digital resources, that would:
   a. Be More Fun: 4/13 = 31%
   b. Be Too Burdensome: 4/13 = 31%
   c. **Not Change Anything: 5/13 = 38%**
6. What is your attitude about the idea of the "digital humanities" generally?
   a. **It Was a Refreshing Change: 8/13 = 62%**
   b. It Sounded Easier But I Didn't Really Get Much Out of It: 2/13 = 15%
   c. I Would Prefer to Just Write a One-Page Reading Response: 3/13 = 23%
7. Which digital humanities assignment did you find most useful?
   a. **Podcast Review: 8.5/13 = 65%**
   b. App Reflection: 4.5/13 = 35%
   c. Neither Were Useful: 0/13 = 0%
8. How did listening to a podcast episode compare to an in-class lecture on the same material?
   a. Listening to a Podcast is Preferable: 1/13 = 8%
   b. Listening to an In-Class Lecture is Preferable: 4.5/13 = 35%
   c. **Both Are About Equally Effective: 7.5/13 = 57%**
9. What did access to the *Confessions* app change about your approach to the text itself?
   a. **The App's Resources Helped Me Understand Augustine Better: 10/13 = 77%**
   b. App Was Cool But Didn't Help Me Understand Augustine Better: 3/13 = 23%
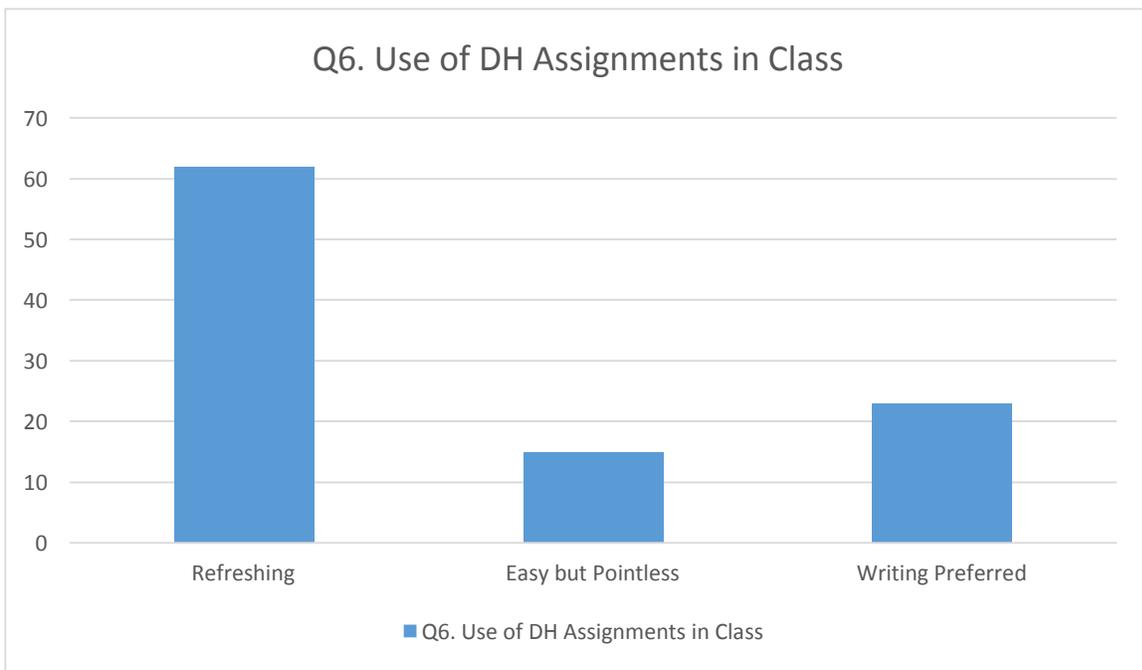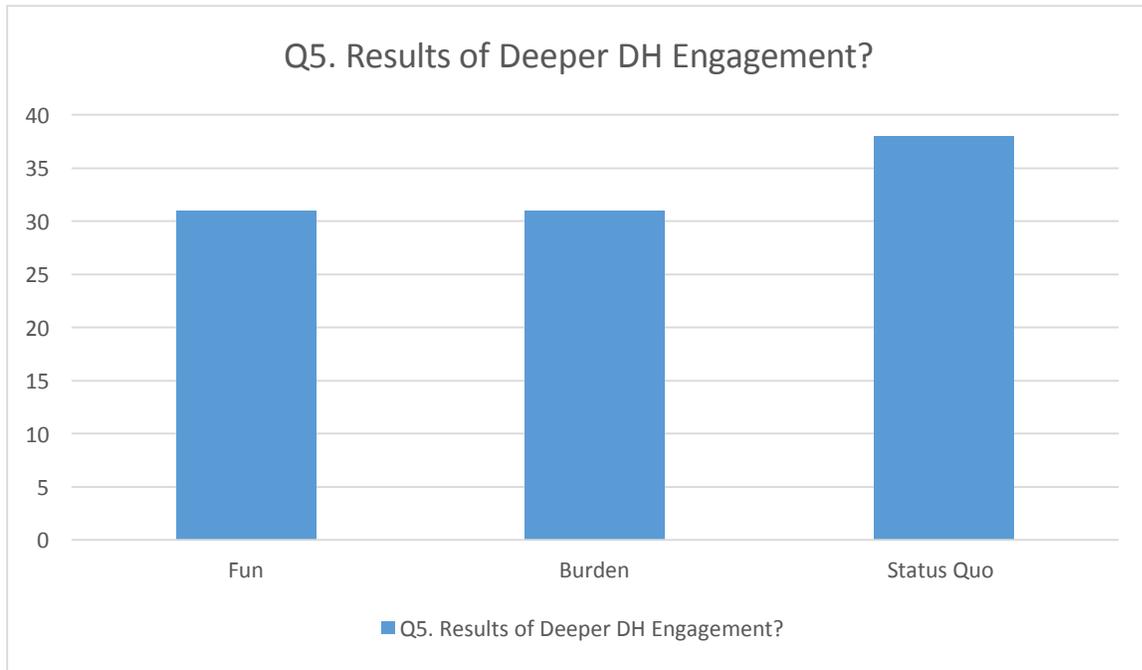   c. The App In No Way Aided My Understanding of Augustine: 0/13 = 0%

10. If you could pass any advice on to the team at Villanova University that made the *Confessions* app, what would it be?
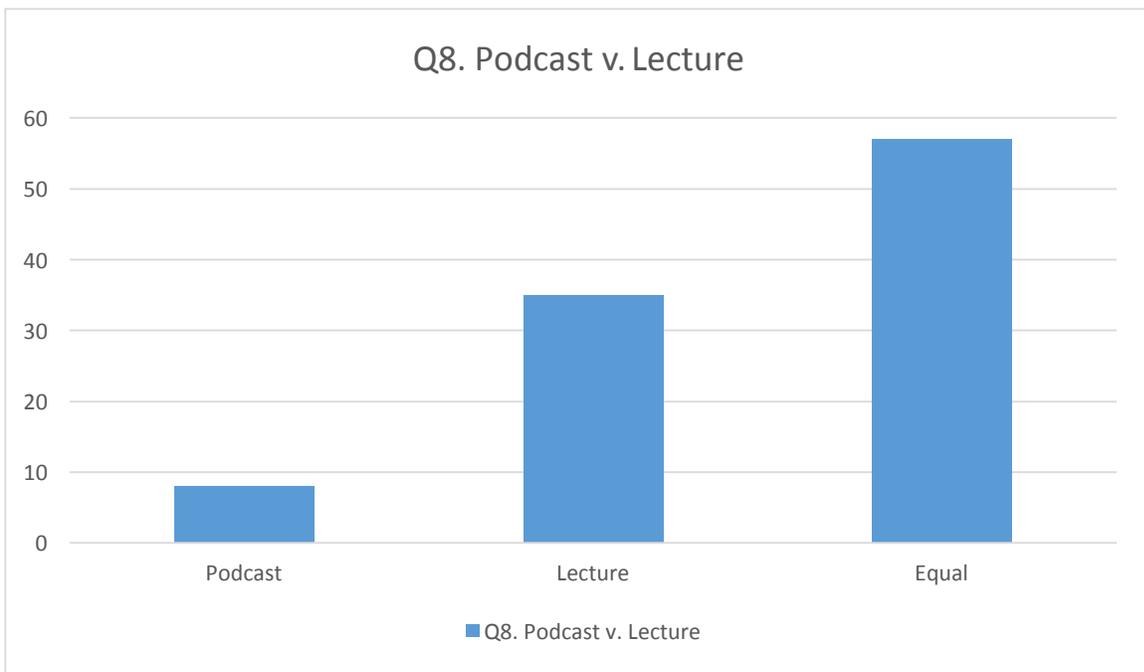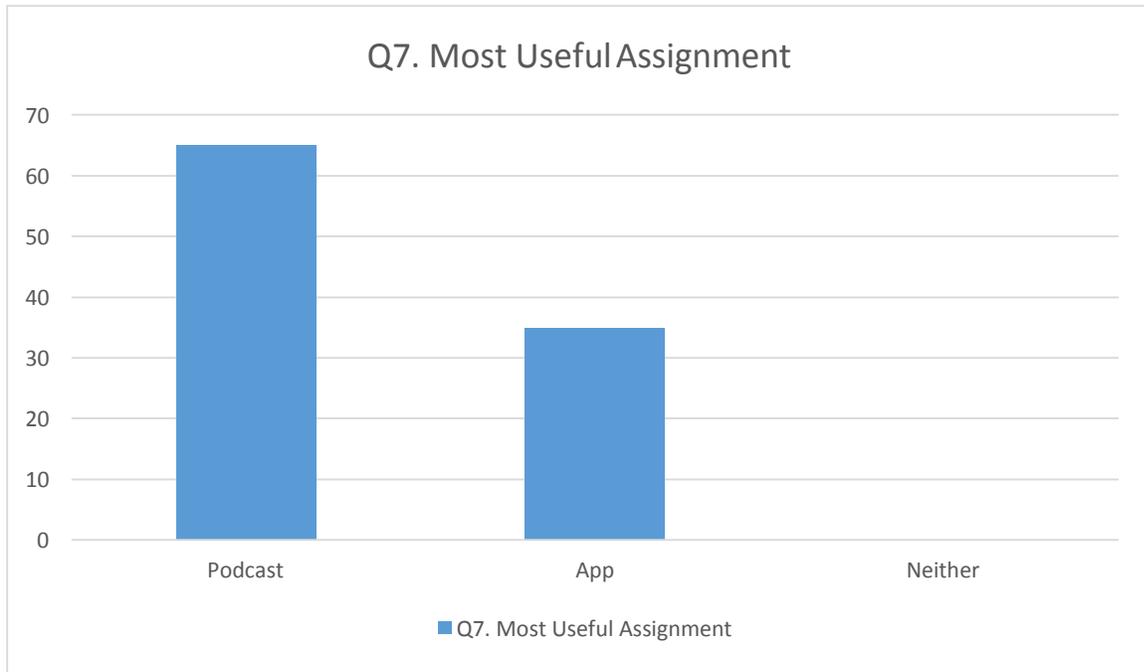   - "It helped my understanding of the text, but the app needs a little work."
    - "Break up the long book audio clip segments."
    - "Emphasize external sources less."
    - "Involve more reflections and commentaries (possibly longer ones)."
    - "The commentaries in the app gave me just a taste, but not enough."
    - "I found the app to be very useful and didn't have many problems with it."
    - "As somebody not entirely familiar with sections of the Bible, abbreviated citations were initially confusing."
    - "I learned to make a pretty good cake from it!"
    - "The app is well made and helped me quite a bit. I would suggest having discussion boards where app users can have discussions with the app creators."
    - "Work out the small bugs to make the whole process smoother."
    - "Great job! Thank you for the hard work. My only advice has to do with the audio format. A different interface might be easier. Other than that, it's fantastic."
    - "The app was useful, but also expensive. It needs work."
    - "The difference between our translation [Hammond] and the app's translation was too big. I understand why, but it made it hard to use in conjunction with our text."
    - "There should be a better way of finding quotes."
    - "Keep doing what you're doing. I found the app to be very helpful."
    - "Reformatting the footnotes would be appreciated, as would an index, specifically for the interpretive articles."
    - "Make it easier to search for keywords while reading through the chapters."

Visualizations of Quantified Feedback Data

Q1. Attitude re: DH Assignments

Q2. Prior Knowledge of Digital Humanities

Q3. Improved Sense of What DH Means?

Q4. DH Difficulty Level

Q5. Results of Deeper DH Engagement?

Q6. Use of DH Assignments in Class

Q7. Most Useful Assignment

Q8. Podcast v. Lecture

Q9. App Aided Understanding of Augustine?

Bar chart showing responses to Q9. App Aided Understanding of Augustine? with categories Definitely (approximately 77), Somewhat (approximately 23), and Not At All (0). Y-axis ranges from 0 to 90.

Legend: Q9. App Aided Understanding of Augustine?

Sample App Reflections from Students

Student 1

During our readings of Augustine's *Confessions*, as well as in our class discussions, I found Villanova's *Confessions* app quite useful as another source of insight to help my understanding of this text. Using an exegetical approach, the *Confessions* app seeks to shed light into the full meaning of Augustine's *Confessions*, and I believe that it does a good job of this. The text in itself is good to read, but I really like the commentary that is provided throughout, as well as the teaching tips to help you gain a deeper understanding of what Augustine is trying to say. The commentaries give in-depth explanations of important topics and help to make clear some of the meaning behind the words of the *Confessions* by acting as a supplemental tool to help gain better understanding of the text. The app relates to the main theme in our course, time, as it also attempts to unpack Augustine's view of time. As much of the *Confessions* app does, on the topic of time, it tries to give the reader some help in understanding what Augustine has to say about this somewhat difficult topic. Throughout much of Book 11, where Augustine gives an extensive explanation of his view on time, the app has commentaries and teaching tips to compliment the text throughout, touching on some of the important areas, and aiming to give the reader some supplemental knowledge. I believe that this app achieves its goal of helping readers better understand Augustine's *Confessions*, as it can be a challenging text to understand at times, and the added commentaries do a good job to fill in readers with important information. The app without a doubt has contributed to my understanding of the primary source material, and I am happy to have access to resources like this to assist me with my learning. Digital technologies such as these I believe can be very helpful resources in classrooms moving forward.

Student 2

The past few weeks I have been engaging with Villanova University's *Confessions* application, and have come to a handful of conclusions based on my experience with it. I recently read through books V and VI to get a better feel for reading the text on this new format and found overall that my opinion was mixed. However, I'd like to preclude that by saying that my own opinion of technology is critical and may have affected my own disposition and conclusions toward the project.

Firstly, I found that the app itself felt very easy to navigate and I enjoyed a great deal. It felt more manageable than most e-book's which goes a long way toward reconciling the limitations of the format; however, I read the Oxford translation by Henry Chadwick and the Loeb translation by Carolyn Hammond, and could not but feel limited by the inability to flip through pages and cross-reference as easily in the app. That being said the app showed its value in its stability: the application did not crash a single time during my use.

Secondly, to address the text itself, I found that the overall translation was of high quality, and found no difficulty reading it. It compared interestingly to the more prosaic Chadwick and the more literal Hammond. It read well but remained not as clear as Hammond nor as aesthetic as Chadwick. One perk, which I believe would have turned out even better in a paper format, was the abundant commentary, context, and exegesis which the app included. Although I did not feel they made the work more intelligible, they did enrich the reading experience. Furthermore, the gallery included was (to me at least) the best part of the project. The ability to see the places and the images of Augustine and his life exponentially increased my pleasure in reading the work, and that improvement was invaluable.

To level a final criticism of Villanova, I found that the notation in the text felt awkward. I am not sure if it is the fact that the buttons had to be of a minimal size to be accessible, but it began to frustrate me when I had recurring purple symbols in the text, which provided only a scant reference to a biblical passage. These notes really stood out when placed in relation to the longer and more robust commentary notes at the begging of the passages. In terms of quality, as well, I found the Oxford translation had the best overall notes. It seemed they contextualized and yet never felt redundant, while their quality seemed better even than the Loeb edition.

Overall, however, I appreciate the efforts of Villanova greatly, but I doubt that I will replace paper editions in the near future. The work itself seems to address a significant flaw in Augustine by making him more accessible with those unfamiliar with his work, while bringing the *Confessions* into the digital age. The fact that anyone can take the *Confessions* on the go and read anywhere a scholarly edition of the book with excellent commentary goes a long way toward providing additional quality work, while at the same time synthesizing the efforts of many scholars. At this, the app excels.

Student 3

While reading Augustine's *Confessions*, I had found that the translation in the Loeb copy was very easy to follow, as the writing was clear, concise, and relatively modern. With that in mind, when there were passages that were somewhat confusing, it wasn't owing to the wording of the translation. As far as I could tell, some of Augustine's ideas were initially lost on me purely because of their somewhat abstract. The *Confessions* app from Villanova was instrumental in my understanding of some of these passages. Rather than googling a specific passage and looking for reliable information that may have helped me to understand what

Augustine had said, I had access to no shortage of reliable and accurate information available to me in the palm of my hand.

The glosses that, in some sections, seem to be consistently at the bottom of each paragraph offer a brief explanation that doesn't interfere with the reading. They also often relate back to other readings that we'd been assigned and discussed in class. In one of the sections on Memory, the app contains glosses that relate the ideas of Augustine to ideas like those of thinkers like Origen and Plotinus, who are each given a small paragraph to explain how their writings are very like the ideas of Augustine, showing the connections between philosophies that exist among thinkers separated by ideology and time. There are simpler footnote-style glosses that will direct you to Bible verses, and there are even more in-depth glosses often before a passage or a section begins.

There's one gloss in the section on time in the *Confessions*, written by Joseph Kelly at the end of the passage 12,14, that not only describes the intent of Augustine over the next few passages, but also gives us some context for how we should read his ideas, as his ideas were coming from a religious perspective, rather than a more modern scientific sense. It's very useful to have access to not only the information and sources in the glosses, but the app goes beyond that and provides very useful contextual information as well.

All in all, the app for me was a very useful tool that helped to gather contextual information that contributed to my understanding of the *Confessions* greatly. The connections drawn between Augustine and other philosophers were helpful in discerning the significance of certain ideas on time that recur among philosophers, as well as how the religious beliefs of the writers we've studied can contribute to their philosophies.

Student 4

In relation to our class, Books XI and XII are the most relevant. To begin with Book XI,

Augustine focusses on Creation in relation to his Christian beliefs. His beliefs on time however,

take on a more Neo-Platonist view. He believes God does not exist in time, similar to the

Demiurge, and neither does his Word. With time on earth, the past and future do not exist and

all we have is the present moment. To further that, he states that time is a distension, or

stretching apart, of the soul. This he finalizes by stating that time only exists in our own

memory. Book XII adds to this entire idea by elaborating on time's relation to heaven and earth.

In this book, two more items are added to the list of things not in time: the Heaven of Heaven

and unformed matter.

        I found the app was very helpful in my understanding before the class discussions.

Combining the timeline and the extra comments for each section, I was able to follow the content

much better. The most helpful portion of the app was the audio. When there was no time to

read, I was able to listen. Time (coincidentally the topic of our course) is valuable to a university

student, so the option to multitask is essential. However, without using the app in combination

with the actual hard copy, it was hard to follow. During class discussions, the translations were

quite different and it was difficult to find the exact quote being discussed. They used descriptive

titles to identify sections in the chapter, but this did not help when searching for a specific quote.

The ability to use a search bar within the chapter also did not work, because the translation

varied for many words. I found that the translation in the app was much longer and

unnecessarily so. In class, when the original word in Latin was being dissected, the Hammond

translation, provided a more precise understanding of the word. If I was able to do this portion of

the class over again I would definitely bring the books to class, as well as using the app. I think

it is overall a very useful tool, but I did not equip myself properly to fully utilize it.

Student 5

The *Confessions* follows Augustine's journey to Christianity and the questions he

pondered throughout that journey. The ability to read this in combination with the Villanova

Confessions app provides students with the opportunity to access footnotes, commentaries,

teaching tips, and highlights. Specifically in Book 11, "Time and Eternity of the *Confessions*,"

the app's content focuses on themes being studied in Dr. Hannan's HIST 476. Augustine's focus

on eternity and Genesis directly correlates with the themes of the ancients' conceptions of time

that Dr. Hannan's students are currently studying.

By interpreting Genesis, Augustine is able to pose questions concerning God's eternal

being and his creation (the world and all of its creatures), ultimately concluding that time is

relevant only to the latter. The Villanova *Confessions* app provides teaching tips (in the section

"In the Beginning God made heaven and earth") to aid in students' understanding of Augustine's

concern with Genesis, while at the same time providing guiding questions about "time" to

consider while reading the work. Although the questions provided from the app's teaching tips

do offer direction for students while reading the *Confessions*, it does not provide them with a

section to post a response to these questions nor does it provide an answer from the app creators

themselves. A discussion board in each section would provide the readers with an opportunity to

discuss those questions posed and would also allow them to inquire about certain insights made

during the reading.

The app has the ability to spark thought processes and discussions, just like a lecture can

evoke student responses. The interactive reading tool guided me through the *Confessions*, while

the teaching tips helped me understand certain religious components of Christianity that

influenced Augustine at the time. Another element of the app that I appreciated was the

opportunity to explore other works that have been influenced by Augustine's *Confessions*.

Specifically, the app details Augustine's influence on Descartes' writing of the *Meditations on*

First Philosophy, especially when it comes to the origin of the concept of eternity.

The app adds more detail to the literary work than the hard copy can provide readers. The

ability to go beyond simple footnotes helps direct students and offers them a higher level of

understanding of the ancient text. A component of the app that did not necessarily aid in my

understanding but was a wonderful bonus was the audio component. The amount of time

dedicated to reading each semester is a rather large amount. Because of that, the opportunity to

listen to the text while performing other daily activities was a luxury.

Student 6

Using Villanova's *Confessions* app, I found that it has much more advantages than

disadvantages. The advantages were the table of contents on the books page, the commentary

section, the timeline, the links and the recordings. The biggest disadvantage of this app is that it

is not the same as the translation of the *Confessions* we used in class.

The app makes it exceedingly simple to find exactly what you are looking for in the

Confessions. Instead of having to search through a chapter to find a specific section; the app has

subdivided the chapters into the different subjects discussed. For example, it was easy for me to

find the section where Augustine discusses his views on Theatre. I simply went to the books

page on the app and scrolled until I found the heading "Student life: sex and shows." I found the

commentary section quite helpful as well. Should you get stuck in a particular section of a book,

you can read the commentaries and they will summarize what St Augustine has said in layman's

terms. This is extremely helpful for people like me who have no problem reading work such as

Shakespeare but have trouble wrapping my mind around something more philosophical. The

timeline is cool because it shows you exactly where in his life Augustine was throughout the

books. I also appreciate the links in the text that will bring you straight to the timeline when

describing a specific event. The links that are highlighted words in red in the text are also

interesting because they will bring you to pictures of what they are discussing. This is really

helpful for visual learners. It is a lot easier to understand the impact of a Greek theatre if you can

actually refer to a picture of what they looked like. The recordings of the chapters were also

extremely helpful as you could listen to someone read the chapters and either follow along or just

take it in. This section would be a huge advantage for students who are auditory learners.

I think that this app would have been a perfect tool had the translations matched. Our

copy is published by the Loeb classical library, whilst theirs is by New City Press. The two

translations are quite different. They both give you a good grasp on the content but it is hard to

follow along if you are listening to a book on the app while following along with the book. All in

all though I think that the Villanova *Confessions* app is a great tool for students to use to

understand St Augustine's *Confessions.*

Student 7

The *Confessions* app was an excellent addition to this class. It complemented the physical

copies that we had in a large number of ways. For instance, it provided extra information about

certain parts, while also making other parts clearer, especially passages that would have

otherwise been difficult to understand while reading on our own. Because of all this, I would

highly recommend the app for anyone who is working with Augustine's *Confessions*. One really

useful aspect of the app is that it has so many footnotes and these footnotes serve a variety of

purposes, from referring the reader to Bible verses that Augustine references to reminding the reader about sections of the book that are useful to remember for specific other parts of the book. On a less serious note I also enjoyed that there is a "St. Augustine's Birthday Cake" recipe contained within the book. However, the most useful aspect for me was that the app included an audio version of the book, and this is something I really loved about the app. This is because I am a slow reader and so it helped me to be able to get through the books much more efficiently. This is not to say that the app is not without problems but these were mostly due to glitches and could easily be resolved with a few more updates. In regards to the theme of our class, the app does not go into a great amount of detail on time specifically but does help a little bit. For instance, there is a specific footnote in Book 12 that relates back to Book 10 and reminds the reader that time began with the creation of mutable things and that eternity is above temporal things. However, I have not looked at every footnote so I may not have seen the full extent to which that app covers the topic of time. All in all, I quite liked the app, was happy that it was included in our class, and would like to see more use of these kinds of materials within classes.

Student 8

The Villanova app for Augustine's *Confessions* was interesting and yet posed some difficulty as a user who hoped to grasp a little bit more of what was going on in Augustine's books. Having access to both a copy of the literature and the app proved to be intriguing, however there were some significant conflicts with using both materials at the same time. For example, the translation that the app uses is not the same translation as the translation in the copies of the text we had access to. This proved to be problematic when I attempted to listen to the audio portion of the app while following along in my hard copy of the book. The words are

obviously different, although an attentive reader can still identify parallels between what is on the page and what the speaker is saying.

Something else that is a critique towards the audio aspect of the app, is that with books 10-13 being astronomically larger, or longer, than the other books, having one audio clip for the entirety of the book is excessive. In the audio of book 10, after the one hour mark, the reader makes a mistake. You can hear his frustration and he is speaking to someone who is not mic'd about whether or not he should start over again. Needless to say, he does not. That being said, if the user was to listen to the audio clips of the books without following along they would be able to grasp the concepts being discussed. As a student who is uncomfortable with the writing techniques of the ancient philosophers, being able to listen to the literature broken up as it should be is helpful in understanding what Augustine is saying.

An aspect of the app that I found to be inconsequential would be the art gallery. As a student, who is not majoring in Augustine, the different depictions of him in stained glass windows or parts of the world do not hold relevance to understanding the text. I found this aspect to be unnecessary for our class in that seeing ruins to a baptistry in North Africa does not further my understanding of Augustine's quest to Christianity. Not all features of this app were influential to my understanding of the material because they were irrelevant to the literature. A map charting Augustine's travels or a timeline does not further explain how Augustine felt about sin or time. Another critique is the expense of the app, because as a student, a $13+ app is a lot of money, especially when you take into consideration the knowledge that I do not purchase apps for personal leisure that cost as much.

It is not to say that the app was irrelevant to the class, rather that there are areas of improvement which could help with the inclusion of the app in this course. Having access to the

app did prove to be useful, because as a student who is always on the go, it is easy to listen to an audio clip to understand the literature while driving or walking to campus. The app reflects a usefulness of technology within the classroom because it provides students with access to the material without the book in front of them. The app contains a copy of the translated literature, audio clips, a timeline, and secondary source segments to further understand the material. Using this technology, a student is then able to further understand and identify the main themes and concepts contained within the text.

Long-Form Student Reflection

Student 9

Today I will be addressing the topic of Digital Humanities, that is to say, the use of digital tools alongside tradition ways of learning. I want to talk about how they have been beneficial in my educational career, as well as how they might benefit others. Society is becoming increasingly dependent on technology and digital information systems, so for students to get the chance to learn how to use these different systems is a great advantage. In the past two years, I have gained experience using tools such as podcasts, digital mapping projects, wiki programs and Apple apps. Ultimately, my experience with these digital tools leads me to believe that it will continue to be a successful and fruitful resource for students now and into the future.

Before I get into the experiences I have had over the last two years, I will go over what I think to be some of the most valuable assets that digital tools deliver. Firstly, changing the scenery of assignments is wonderful. The idea that in everyday life people will continually write papers is quite a stretch. So, having a variety of assignments is a great idea because it not only keeps the mind alert and learning but also it gives students the opportunity to use others avenues for presenting information. This alone is a benefit, since some students might excel given these digital opportunities, while others who are not so adept might have the opportunity to learn about them.

The second major asset these tools provide is a variety of learning styles, ranging from the aural to the visual and kinesthetic, which can benefit those students who find it easier to learn with different styles. Such variety can also benefit students in general, allowing for maximum sensory stimulation and retention. These technologies are generally made available by professors to be used by students as a secondary tool for learning. Most of the digital tools used can also be paired

up with traditional ways of studying and learning which, again, can maximize the potential for student success.

Thirdly, the skills required to use these tools are also learned and can be used out in society after graduation. The steps involved in learning them are generally easy to grasp, but their applications can be quite broad. They not only give students the skill to use the program, but also give students access to information and insights they might not have had before. These tools, in my opinion, are beneficial to the success of the student in most areas of their academic and professional life.

Lastly, these different tools can help students understand primary and secondary source materials in different ways than can traditional methods. That being said, I think that these two ways should remain mixed. Using them together allows for the collectively gathered information to be most effectively used by the student.

The university is in a constant flux of technological change, and we as students have already witnessed this shift. Everything that was once inaccessible for students is now at our fingertips, including constant contact with professors via e-mail, BlackBoard, the MyStudent System app, PowerPoint, access to digital libraries and so on. This is why I believe that exposure to these digital tools is important.

It should be useful to talk about a few of the experiences I have had with digital humanities tools. There are ups and downs for each of these tools but in general the pros out weigh the cons. First up will be the podcast. Peter Adamson, in his podcast *the History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps*, delivers an academic yet contemporary approach to philosophical history that attempts to decipher the meanings presented in primary and secondary source materials so that most listeners can grasp the concepts. Using this podcast as a secondary tool for learning has been successful for

me thus far. Not only does it allow me to multi-task, so that I can accomplish things and learn at the same time, but it also gives another view of the information so that I can compare and contrast different ideas.

There are cases where having no prior knowledge is not an issue. For instance, in episode 110, "Life and Time: Augustine's *Confessions*," Adamson provided background information about the autobiographical source. He told his audience about who Augustine was, when he lived, and where he was writing. By elaborating on several key points of Augustine's thought, Adamson gave his listener a basic grounding in Augustine. Towards the end of the episode Adamson also headlines the subsequent episodes that contain a more in-depth look into other topics related to the current one, and in this case the next one was Augustine's use of language in the *Confessions*.

On the other hand, listening to episode 30, "A Likely Story: Plato's *Timaeus*," it was beneficial to have some understanding of the text in order to gain insight into the discourse. However, it still contributed to a deeper understanding of the source materials. Adamson breaks down all aspects of the *Timaeus*, unpacking terminology as he goes, such as, what the demiurge is, what forms are, and how the cosmos was made. The preceding and succeeding episodes give some context about the philosophical mind of Plato, which can also help contextualize the works.

Adamson also employs comedy and contemporary links in order to connect the past to the present. This tactic also keeps listeners engaged in the material, in a way that not only stimulates thought, but also demonstrates how the past can still be linked to today. In one of his episodes he even uses a quote from *Lord of the Rings* (a personal favourite of mine) to make a point. In sum, this tool really helps people who benefit from audio learning in conjunction with visual learning. If classes are not recorded, having a chance to hear some of the related topic material a second or third time also proves beneficial to the acquisition of understanding on the given topic.

In addition to Adamson's podcast, I have also gained much from an app version of Augustine's *Confessions*. Villanova University created this app, for devices like Apple and Android, which could be easily accessible to people interested in learning about Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), an early Christian theologian and philosopher. Augustine's *Confessions* was focused on heavily in a recent class of mine, so this became a tool to be regularly used. Using the app as a tool for studying was beneficial for me because it supplements the primary information with commentaries. It has audio recitations of the primary text as well as other fun links to engage the user, such as a quiz, a Latin section, a photo gallery, and even a recipe for a birthday cake. Using technological tools for learning can help increase information intake and understanding, thus improving the grades of the students using them.

Villanova's app interface is very straightforward and easy to navigate. The app also has two different versions of the table of contents and encompasses the works of Augustine's *Confessions* as a whole, providing the information in three distinct ways. The first is a typed translation of the primary text, which allows students to read on the go without necessarily having the books with them. The second is a detailed commentary on each book, which delves into its many meanings (both hidden and blatant), helping clear up concepts that may be hard to understand. The third form is an audio version, which enables students to listen while doing other things. I used the audio the most, as I have many things to do at once, and it was very convenient to be able to click a button and hear the words while I did other things. I also read my book along with the audio, which showed me that there is more than one way to translate something and that each translation can create a different meaning. The added benefit to the audio aspect is that it can be played repeatedly for maximum retention. The app has proven a useful tool for learning the material.

The extras included in the app are also helpful, using images to convey context and offering study tools (such as the quiz) that can help with retention and recall. The images provide the other side of the text, helping students visualize the time, place, characters and other details about Augustine and the period. The quiz goes through some of the key elements and important aspects of the *Confessions* so that you can test your retention and understanding of the material. This app also provides a few hymns that focus on key people and aspects of the *Confessions*, which adds to contextualization of the material, as well as verbal comments by other students that read Augustine for the first time and had insightful remarks to make about the material. Lastly, the app provided a cake recipe that was supposed to be like the one Monica, Augustine's mother, baked for him, which is just cool even if it wasn't important to the understanding of the material.

In another recent class, we were assigned a digital mapping assignment wherein we had to find ancient cities and plot them on a modern map. There were options to add pictures, background info, road networks, and so on. This was a great project to get the mind to visualize where in the world history was happening. This opened up a whole new avenue of understanding and it encouraged me to search out more information. The idea that modern cities were built on top of ancient ones was in my head already, but seeing it on a real time map really gave me a deeper understanding. The digital map is the closest you get to seeing the real location without actually being there.

Two projects I have done for other classes involved creating a wiki page as well as a web page. These tools were fun to learn how to use and will hopefully have helped me attain a few required skills for my future pursuit of a Masters in Library Information Studies. I found these both beneficial because they were a great combination of traditional book- and article-reading with internet-scouring for images and websites other than the databases on the MacEwan Library Site.

They also allowed for free creative thinking in the area of presentation. It was a nice change from the Chicago Manual of Style and the standard 12-point, Times New Roman font. (Don't get me wrong: I love that style too). But the ability to mix academic critical thinking methods and academic creative thinking methods was fantastic.

Overall, I found all four styles of tools have been and will continue to be successful for me. I will endeavour to use them again in order to gain insight and improve my understanding of the primary and secondary source material relevant to my classes. (This will, of course, take place with permission from my professors and by no means serve as a replacement for their brilliant teaching.). I would recommend the use of digital tools more broadly, so that other students can also gain knowledge they can use both inside and outside of school. I also hope that there will be more opportunities to gain access to more tools and varieties of assignments, as I continue to grow my repertoire in the field of digital humanities.