Instructor’s Guide

ACTIVITY TWO

Browsing the Database of Religious History

Target Audience:
- All students new to the DRH (undergraduate and graduate)

Activity Type:
- Individual and Group Short Assignment (in class or short homework activity)
- Digital activity - computer and internet access required
- Step-by-step linear tasks
- Think-Pair-Share reflection questions

Activity Goals:
- Introduce students to the “Browse” feature of the DRH
- Improve students’ digital data literacy skills
- Encourage critical consideration of the subjective nature of knowledge construction

In this activity, students will be introduced to the “Browse” feature on the Database of Religious History (DRH). The students will be asked to follow a series of instructions that will guide them through a search for an entry in the database. It is helpful if they already know which religious group or place they wish to study. They will then be instructed to search through the entry to find specific pieces of information. Once they have worked to find the data independently, they are encouraged to answer additional reflection questions. They are instructed to read through these questions on their own before working through the answers with a partner or small group, in a Think-Pair-Share style assignment.

The short browsing questions are straightforward searches for information. Students are asked to note the citation information for the entry, to write down examples of additional resources, and finally to browse for specific data. Identifying these different sections will help students use the database in the future.

The reflection questions ask the students to consider the data more critically. In particular, they are asked if they disagree with the answers. This question is designed to encourage them to consider the subjective nature of history construction. The final question asks, “Consider the structure of the database as sets of expert answers to guided questions. How does this impact what you were able to learn about your religious group? What does this suggest about the construction of history?” The goal of this question is to encourage the students to think about the value and limitations of online databases to provide information. Some answers may not be available because the expert chose to leave a field empty.

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As the experts are also answering a set series of questions, there may be information that is not available. On the other hand, these set questions ensure that certain information is provided, and that the different entries in the database are comparable. Thinking through these possibilities will help the students better consider how to use this resource in their future research.

By the end of this activity, students will have the skills necessary to do basic searches for information on a selected religious group, place, object, or text. To gain experience with more advanced querying, we recommend that the students be asked to move on to: Activity Three: Visualize and the Database of Religious History.