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## Foreword

# Current perspectives in human and social science research Current Research in the UOC's Arts and Humanities Department

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These lines serve as an introduction to a dossier describing the work of a wide range of researchers. It is perhaps necessary to point out that what brings these researchers together is not that they share the same research directions or perspectives, or focus on the same topics or historical periods, but rather the fact that they are all members of a team that is responsible for the collection of degree courses forming a single department that has as its goal the creation, supervision and provision of up-to-date education: the Arts and Humanities Department.

The Arts and Humanities Department offers three degree programmes (Humanities, Catalan Language and Literature and East Asian studies), an officially recognised master's degree (Culture Management) and several in-house postgraduate programmes and courses.<sup>1</sup> The interuniversity master's degree in Culture Management, run jointly with the University of Girona and the University of the Balearic Islands, offers the choice of a research-oriented or a professionally oriented course.<sup>2</sup>

Travelling back in time, 1996—the university's second year of existence—saw the launch of Arts and Humanities Department in the UOC. Two courses were offered initially: the original Humanities degree, and the Catalan Language and Literature degree (launched in 1998). Both were underpinned by the desire to develop an entirely novel and innovative approach to teaching. Even from the early years of consolidation of the Department, and despite the initial demands of teaching according to this new model, research was already acquiring a significant dimension. This is evident from both the existence of research groups from the department's early days and its level of scientific production. For example, research groups—Òliba in 1999 and Museia in 2005—were founded in the area of cultural heritage and its links to digital technologies; and since around 2001, a number of our academics have participated in a virtual communities interdisciplinary research group, GIRCOM, which conducts research into the construction of identities, communication processes and online socialisation.

1. Postgraduate diploma in Arts, Digital Media and Popular Culture (UOC-Laboral);  
Postgraduate diploma in Translation and Technologies;  
Postgraduate diploma in Books and Reading in the Information Society (UOC-Group 62-Leqtar);  
Postgraduate diploma in Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Management;  
Master's degree in Islamic Civilisation;  
Postgraduate degree in Cultural Tourism;  
Postgraduate degree in Culture Sectors and Industries;  
Postgraduate degree in Heritage Interpretation (with the University of the Balearic Islands);  
Postgraduate degree in Culture Management and Policies (with the University of Girona).

2. This master's degree has three specialist courses—Heritage interpretation, Cultural tourism and Culture sectors and industries—while embracing a cross-cutting perspective on all three areas.



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The Language and Literature area—which, between 2005 to 2009 launched the East Asian, Foreign Languages and Culture Studies programmes—conducts research into sociolinguistics, language technologies, literature theory, comparative literature and Catalan literature. The academics in the Foreign Languages programme—now part of the UOC Language School offering specific foreign language training and French and English training in a number of official courses—have conducted research into the application of technologies to teaching, the evaluation of language programmes, success and failure conditions for virtual students and language teaching through literature.

The notion that teaching and research are crucial aspects of the university's function and inextricably linked is firmly subscribed to by the Arts and Humanities Department. The two spheres nurture each other and, without either, academic life would have little meaning. For this reason—and despite the demands arising from the ongoing development of new virtual learning environments, materials and online teaching strategies—great efforts are invested in launching and consolidating research lines and groups that would serve as an eloquent testimony to the importance attached to this university activity in the UOC.

This is the context in which the UOC embarked on its first experience with an online journal. *Digithum. Humanities in the Digital Era* was launched to coincide with the creation of the department and the launch of its research activities. The journal was initially proposed, in the context of a contemporary society characterised by the emergence of the digital technologies, as a medium for publishing the department's research and for highlighting innovations in the social and human sciences and in how they are taught. It has steadily improved over the years to achieve the standards required nowadays of academic journals. Furthermore, parallel to the department expanding its scope and acquiring an international dimension, the journal too has also become more international and has increasingly featured research articles.

Research in our undergraduate and master's programmes is fundamentally organised in three arms: AQU<sup>3</sup>-recognised research led by an academic from the department; research performed by department academics in groups based at other universities; and research at the individual level or at an early stage, performed on the periphery of research groups or through research networks.

This way of organising research responds to the range of fields in which the department's staff has performed or is performing research. The breadth of research is reflected in the following list of main research topics: computational linguistics, contemporary Catalan and Spanish history, urban history, history studies and theories of nationalism, political science and international studies applied to East Asia, social studies of science and technology, studies of art in relation to history and thought, the history of

contemporary Catalan literature, comparative literature, and various aspects of culture. This is not to include research performed in the groups to be described in more detail below.

Department academics are involved in modern culture and literature and 16th century Latin-Catalan historiographical production projects (N. Figueras), conducted in the framework of the University of Girona's Modern Language and Literature consolidated research group (SGR 2009-00129). They also participate in a project researching 17th century relations between China and Spain and China as reflected in Spanish documents (A. Busquets). Noteworthy also is the sustained research effort—largely through participation in European projects—in the area of the management of multilingualism and linguistic policies (I. Marí, M. Strubell), overseen by the Linguamón-UOC Chair in Multilingualism.

As for the creation of groups, some of the department's academics have come together in a group called ALTER: Crisis, alterity and representation (C. Prado, D. Martínez, M. Crespín), to conduct critical research from a multidisciplinary perspective into a broad range of cultural, intellectual, artistic and literary phenomena in East Asia—and area that is still largely peripheral in Spanish academia.

Aside from those already mentioned, department academics participate in research groups based in other universities. One such project is the consolidated research group IULATERM, in the Applied Linguistics University Institute at Pompeu Fabra University, which researches lexis, terminology, specialised discourse and linguistic engineering. Research in the applied linguistics field is represented by departmental participation (O. Domènech) in the Neology Observatory and in the APLE research project referring to Spanish lexical updates from the Catalan press, funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation (FFI2009-12188-C05-01; 2010-2012).

Sustained and productive research into language processing by members of the department's Language Processing Group has led to their inclusion in GRIAL, an interuniversity team officially recognised as a consolidated research group by the Catalan government (SGR 2009-00049). This group's research into language processing in a broad sense, including human processing and computer-mediated processing, corresponds within cognitive science, an interdisciplinary field that embraces psychology, linguistics and artificial intelligence, among other disciplines. Our department is also involved in research into applied linguistics, in areas such as automated translation, the development of resources for computerised language processing and educational applications (S. Climent, T. Oliver, M. Coll-Florit, J. Moré).

Another group in which UOC academics participate is the Social Anthropology Research Group GIAS (consolidated group

3. AQU (University Quality Agency) is a Catalan government body that oversees quality in the Catalan university system. Visit: <[www.aqu.cat](http://www.aqu.cat)>.



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2005SGR1022) based at Rovira i Virgili University, URV, Tarragona. It conducts research into medical, urban, economic, industrial and philosophical anthropology and also into the anthropology of religion and of heritage. Anthropological research in GIAS is exemplified by UOC participation (B. Enguix) in the research project *Transnational love: the creation and development of mixed couples in Spain*, funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology (National R+D Plan, 2010-2012).

Our academics also participate in ATIC, an interdisciplinary technology and social action research group based in the UOC Psychology Department and officially recognised as an emerging research group. ATIC studies the role of technoscience in shaping and organising social action. A. Vayreda is currently cooperating in the project *Technoscientific controversies and citizen participation regarding policies for the care of dependents*, funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology (National R+D Plan 2008-2011).

Research into national conflicts and nationalist movements around the world has been strengthened thanks to the fact that the National and Identity Studies Area (AENI), and its director Professor Agustí Colomines, now forms part of the Arts and Humanities Department. Professor Colomines is also a member of the Grup de Recerca i Anàlisi del Món Actual GRANMA ['Current World Research and Analysis Group'], which is a consolidated research group recognised by the Catalan government (2009 SGR 99, 2009-2013).

Still active are some of the UOC research groups that pioneered the study of heritage, museology and museography and their interactions with the information and communications technologies, for example, Museia (G. Munilla, L. Solanilla, A. Colombo).

Three UOC-led teams in particular, recognised by the Catalan government as emerging research groups, complete the comprehensive map of current research by arts and humanities academics in the UOC.

One such group is *identi.cat*, which performs interdisciplinary research in language, culture and identity in the global era.<sup>4</sup> Departing from the premises of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the group critically analyses discourses on language and identity in modernity with a view to devising a new theoretical framework that questions the sociological and anthropological presupposition that identity is intrinsically linked to territory. The group also explores the time dimensions of social phenomena with a view to identifying social and cultural processes in the construction of identities in their historical context.

Another recognised research group is the Mediaccions digital culture group,<sup>5</sup> which conducts research into technology-mediated transformations in cultural practices, particularly in the internet and the new media. Its aim is to approach contemporary cultural production from an empirical, qualitative and interdisciplinary perspective. Current research is mainly focused on an analysis of emerging creative practices associated with user participation in content creation (from productive practices in video and photography to collaborative cinema and co-creation between users, artists and the culture industry), taking into account the identity formation processes, subjectivities and forms of sociability that emerge in the relationship between users and the information and communication technologies.

The third group is GRECS,<sup>6</sup> which researches culture and society, analysing the impact of the media, communication technologies and materials supplied by the market in contemporary capitalist society. It performs research in three specific areas: cultural and artistic production; emotions and experiences in contemporary culture; and the link between cultural differences and social inequalities.

This particular issue of *Digithum* is devoted to these three research groups, each described in some detail in terms of theories, methodologies and the kind of research being performed. We hope that you find the articles of interest.



4. Visit: <<http://www.mapadelconeixement.com/fitxa.php?id=19>>.

5. Visit: <[www.mediaciones.es](http://www.mediaciones.es)>.

6. Visit: <<http://culturaisocietat.wordpress.com/>>