

MUSC 089H: *Digital Isabella d'Este*  
Prof. Anne MacNeil  
Department of Music

*Digital Isabella d'Este* is designed to prepare students for future opportunities in the digital humanities, international research collaborations, and interdisciplinary European studies. Through group work on the on-going development of an open-access digital research forum, we will study the correspondence, music, and history of the most prominent female figure of the Italian Renaissance, Isabella d'Este, Marchesa of Mantua (1474–1539). Because Isabella d'Este is the textbook example of a multi-talented Italian “Renaissance woman,” her activities interest researchers in a wide range of disciplines. Our project will aim to assemble at one site a tool for continuing collaborative study of all of her pursuits. Direct access to Isabella’s correspondence, the rooms she lived in, and the artifacts of her aesthetic environment are currently restricted to those who can travel to a small city in Italy where these materials are preserved. Upon arrival in Mantua, one may (with special permission) visit the famous art and performance space Isabella created in the Ducal Palace, her *studiolo*, but such visits can be disappointing. Except for ceiling decorations and the remnants of a few painted walls, these rooms stand empty today, their paintings, books, sculptures, clocks, and musical instruments scattered in museum collections around the globe, their music long silenced. *Digital Isabella d'Este* seeks to assemble interactive resources for study of this important figure “in the round.”

*About the instructor: My love for Renaissance Mantua began while I was writing my doctoral dissertation on music and the commedia dell'arte (improvised theater of the Italian Renaissance – an art form that continues today in the films of Roberto Benigni). While studiously examining documents in the state archives there, I met and became friends with other students and researchers who were also investigating the history of this magical city. Many of these people are still my best friends. One of them, Deanna Shemek (a Literature Prof. at the Univ. of California, Santa Cruz) and I have started to build an interactive online research site called Digital Isabella d'Este, so we can bring the wonders of Renaissance Mantua to students and researchers around the world. We are hoping you will join us on this adventure!*