

Chapter 7

A DH State of Mind: Libraries and the Digital Humanities

Cindy Elliott

The University of Arizona Libraries, USA

Chris Kollen

The University of Arizona Libraries, USA

Mary Feeney

The University of Arizona Libraries, USA

Veronica Reyes-Escudero

The University of Arizona Libraries, USA

ABSTRACT

Partnering with faculty and students working in the digital humanities is a natural extension of librarian roles as liaisons, subject specialists, curators, and digital collections specialists. Librarians are well-positioned to identify campus needs and opportunities, and provide research consultations, information resources, and digital project management expertise for the digital humanities. The authors propose that a “digital humanities state of mind” is a way for librarians to approach engaging in and supporting the digital humanities. This chapter explores the roles and contributions of librarians working on digital humanities projects, examines how some libraries collaborate in the digital humanities at their institutions, and explains the importance of environmental scanning and needs assessment for understanding the digital humanities researchers at one’s own institution. The authors discuss three examples of digital humanities library collaborations: digitization of Mexican and Mexican American newspapers, digitization of borderland materials, and a 16mm film project.

INTRODUCTION

In a special issue on Digital Humanities (DH) in the *Journal of Library Administration*, Rockenbach (2013) noted that “it is indeed a DH moment in libraries” (p. 8). Others have pointed out that the digital humanities are “hot” (Little, 2011, p. 352) and that “this is a pivotal moment for the digital humanities” (Borgman, 2009, para. 1). More and more libraries are trying to figure out how to support DH. The University of Arizona (UA) Libraries, too, is exploring how to contribute to digital humanities research on its campus. Some of our development of DH support has been organic, growing out of liaison connections with faculty. Some of it has been purposeful, through active and directed environmental scanning and needs assessment specifically around digital humanities. Some of it has been in hindsight – in

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recognizing that already-developed projects and services have the potential to benefit digital humanities research. Our progress towards a focus on digital humanities was not systematic at first, and indeed Posner (2013a) found that, “most library-based DH is being done in a very piecemeal fashion” (p. 44). As we have learned more about the growing emphasis on digital humanities among faculty and administrators at our institution, we are working on bringing some order to the unplanned.

This chapter describes these different pieces of our somewhat circuitous route to engaging in the digital humanities – the purposeful, the serendipitous, and the organic – and how, through developing a DH state of mind, we are bringing them together under an umbrella of digital humanities in the library.

BACKGROUND

One of the first questions for many getting involved in digital humanities is what *are* the “digital humanities”? Participants in the annual Day of DH have offered their own definitions of digital humanities. Not surprisingly, there are many different definitions, but some commonality emerges, mainly around the use of digital technologies to inform humanities research. Keywords like interdisciplinary, collaboration, different, and new also are commonly used. One participant simply offered this as a definition: “TBD” (Bonds, Day of DH, 2014, p. 2). There are differing views of what is and what should be considered digital humanities, and what does and doesn’t make a scholar a digital humanist. Svensson (2012, pp. 44-47) analyzed four statements or descriptions about the digital humanities: from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Office of Digital Humanities, from a white paper from the UCLA Center for Digital Humanities, from a junior scholar perspective, and from a panel at the Modern Language Association Convention in 2011. These different descriptions, and Svensson’s discussion, highlight the differing and evolving views of the digital humanities. He proposes the digital humanities as a “trading zone and meeting place” (Svensson, 2012, p. 52), which encourages participation, interdisciplinarity, openness, and sharing of interests. There is a range of disciplines involved in digital humanities, across the arts and humanities (Sula, 2013, p. 16), with potential for many participants and contributions.

Some libraries approach digital humanities as a service. Vinopal and McCormick (2013, p. 31) developed a four-tier service model for supporting digital scholarship with sustainable and scalable services. The first tier includes the provision of tools that meet basic needs of many faculty and students, such as shared file storage and learning management systems. Tier 2 is the provision of research services that benefit many researchers, including an institutional repository, journal hosting, and copyright support. Tier 3 is designed to add on to the second tier and allow for some customization of service for some researchers, such as project consultation and grants support service. Their fourth tier of applied research and development, described as “more experimental” (Vinopal & McCormick, 2013, p. 33), would be focused on developing partnerships, tools, and more. Others argue that “digital humanities in libraries isn’t a service” (Muñoz, 2012, para. 5) and question whether it should be less about providing services “and more about building on our own organizational and operational knowledge to model the digital humanities” (Nowviskie, 2013, p. 60). Maron & Pickle (2014, pp. 23-35) describe three models for supporting DH: the service model, the lab model, and the network model. Strengths and drawbacks of each model are discussed. For example, in the service model, libraries may not be seen as full partners, and an important step would be “reframing...the library as a scholarly partner” (Maron & Pickle, 2014, p. 25). The network model could have a “strong hub at its center, like a library or a DH center, and many nodes supplying specialist support as needed” (Maron & Pickle, 2014, p. 34). Regardless of these differing

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