Building a Bridge to Next Generation DH Services in Libraries with a Campus Needs Assessment

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This poster reports on a needs assessment for digital humanities library services undertaken at large research university in order to provide a basis for transition to a
next phase of Digital Humanities (DH) support at a library supporting a growing amount of DH work on campus. It reports key findings and how the library services will evolve to meet needs identified on campus.

A recent survey tallied over ninety research centers and initiatives around the world that support DH research, and the majority are associated with university campuses. The recent ARL report Supporting Digital Scholarship (Mulligan 2016) observed the trend for digital scholarship support to be centered in a single department, sometimes in a dedicated digital scholarship center, but with support for digital scholarship extending throughout the library. Despite the growing number of DH initiatives and support models for digital scholarship at institutions of higher education around the U.S. and world, few have conducted formal needs assessments on their campuses to ascertain the needs of researchers and other stakeholders. The professional literature that provides a strong guiding framework for this study includes the report on the University of Colorado's recent digital humanities needs assessment (Lindquist et al., 2013) and the Ithaka S+R Sustaining Digital Humanities study and Implementation Toolkit (Maron and Pickle, 2014).

The members of the working group conducting this needs assessment sought to use the study to provide a bridge to the next generation of DH services in the library. The timing was opportune, as there were several features of the library and campus environment at that moment made this a good time to assess DH needs. First, the library’s digital scholarship public service space had entered its fifth year and had begun planning to move to a new, larger, and more visible space. Researchers’ and instructors’ interest in DH collaborations with the library had steadily grown since the foundation of DH services in 2010. The library had grown support for digital scholarship and communication in recent years and, like many peer institutions, sought to increase capacity by involving more librarians in DH services. All of this planning required updated knowledge of campus DH activity in order to evolve services appropriately.

For the first phase of the study, two members of the team conducted a total of 15 interviews with faculty, administrators, academic professionals, and graduate students from multiple colleges and campus units with interest or active involvement in digital humanities research and teaching. The group also reviewed recent dissertations across a range of arts, humanities, and humanistic social science fields to identify recent DH related work and the advisors for those projects.

From the interview responses, the working group developed a survey protocol for the second stage of the study. The group administered a survey that was sent to a random sample of 5% of faculty and graduate students from the colleges and units of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Fine and Applied Arts, College of Media, and School of Information Sciences; as well as targeted sampling of known practitioners of digital scholarship on campus. The survey was open for two months from November 2016 through early January 2017, and gathered 55 responses.

The group identified several areas of need expressed by researchers. These included access to collections and data, funding, networks of research and community, education, and infrastructure and research support. The study showed some differences between needs of graduate students and researchers. For example, graduate students saw a greater urgency around library support for tools and software. Faculty and staff saw greater urgency across all other areas including access to library expertise, assistance with access to digital content, and data storage. Access to digital collections as data appeared as a key barrier to researchers pursuing projects.

Based on these needs, the group developed six broad recommendations for library services: (1) provide opportunities for in-depth training; (2) connect the library’s role in research data curation to digital scholarship creation; (3) expand the library’s strengths in discovery and access to digital collections; (4) build space and opportunities for people to form communities of practice, (5) act as a key node in the network of digital scholarship research initiatives, and (6) build library personnel capacity for digital scholarship services. Each of these recommendations had specific associated action items.

This poster will provide an opportunity to discuss these findings, the steps being taken by the library to accomplish the goals identified, and the general landscape of next generation DH services in libraries.

References