

When TEI Comes to the Library: Meeting the Needs of Humanities Computing Scholars



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INTRODUCTION

- The humanities are still the most likely group to see librarians as integral to their scholarly practices, 10% more so than those in social science and 20% more so than those in the sciences (Housewright and Schonfield, 2008).
- Institutional repositories are gradually becoming the home to more and more research data from a variety of disciplines, but much of the effort to date has been directed towards scientific data.
- Libraries need insight into the emerging field of humanities computing and what it means for the future of institutional repositories
- Despite their growing acceptance, humanities computing projects are still struggling for recognition as tenure-eligible scholarship in many ways, and a key component of this is the lack of a structured system for publishing, evaluating, and preserving these projects.
- As libraries expand their repository collections to include data sets and other forms of scholarship, they seem like natural partners for digital humanists in their quest to establish authority and persistence for their work.
- By understanding the current practices of these scholars, we can help to inform the way libraries will acquire and preserve humanities computing projects.

METHODS

RESEARCH DESIGN

- Participants were recruited from a variety of institutions.
- Participants were selected to include a broad range of subject specialties, data curation needs, tenure status, and location.
- Participants were all from U.S. institutions, because the practice of digital humanities differs significantly from country to country.
- All participants were selected from institutions WITHOUT a university-sponsored humanities computing center, in order to analyze the experience of scholars at institutions without existing structured support for digital humanities work.
- Interviews were designed to complement the analysis of data curation practices at humanities computing centers conducted by Munoz, et al., 2011.
- One hour phone interviews conducted with participants between April-June 2010.

SELECTED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Can you tell me about a digital humanities project you're currently involved with?
 - What is your role on this project?
- What do you see as the purpose of your project, and/or what research question is it trying to answer?
- Who do you see as the users of your project? (yourself, other researchers, students, general public, etc.)
 - If you're making all or part of your project available to people besides yourself, what are you making available to them?
 - What will they be able to do with it? (e.g. can they download the entire thing, search it online, etc.)
- Do you plan to store and preserve any part of this long-term? (Either the project as a whole or any data you produce from it?)
- Are there any new things you envision users being able to do with your project or its data in the future?
- What resources or services do you wish you had access to that would make work on your projects easier?
- Is anyone from the library involved in any of your projects?
 - In what capacity?
 - Will you seek out library involvement in future projects?

“Humanities disciplines such as history, literature, art, music, and philosophy are profoundly important to our society. These disciplines simultaneously create and mobilize the documentary record of the human condition, helping us remember and understand who we are and what we may become.

‘[R]esearch in the humanities is becoming data-centric, with a large amount of data available in digital formats. These developments quickly change the landscape of humanities research.’
(Blanke, Dunn & Dunning, 2006).

The need for improved understanding of curatorial practices, and education of a humanities data curation workforce, is therefore urgent. “

-From Renear, et al., DigCCurr 2009

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

WHAT IS DIGITAL HUMANITIES DATA?

- Digital Humanities encompasses a broad variety of potential archival items
 - XML files
 - Images
 - Websites
 - GIS projects
 - Software and tools
- Projects are often complex and interlinked, e.g.:
 - Images and their associated text documents
 - TEI-encoded documents with references to images, geospatial data, etc.
 - Databases

FACULTY “WANTS”

- Full text search
- “Community-driven knowledge base”
- Collaborative editing
- Tech-savvy collaborators and partners

QUESTIONS FOR LIBRARIES

- Humanities research is often about the relationships between texts, people, locations. Can your repository accommodate and maintain the relationships among various items?
- Because digital humanities projects tend toward complex resources in which the context of and relationships between items is a key component of research, how will we expand our idea of the “item” to encompass such complex, relationship-driven entities?
- Is the repository as it stands now the best place to store and maintain these resources?
- How to store and manage ongoing research or resources that may never really be “done”? Requires libraries to think of themselves as publishers, not just preservationists.
- Many humanists want to make use of technology in presenting the results of their research, but don't have time to acquire the skills. Can librarians step into this role?

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