White Paper Report

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Sustaining the Digital Humanities:

Lessons Learned (NEH white paper)

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Introduction

Ithaka S+R recently completed a study, with generous funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities' Office of Digital Humanities, that explored the different models colleges and universities have adopted to support digital humanities (DH) outputs on their campuses. The final report, entitled *Sustaining the Digital Humanities: Host Institution Support beyond the Start-Up Phase*, and the accompanying *Sustainability Implementation Toolkit*, are intended to guide faculty, campus administrators, librarians, and directors of support units as they seek solutions for coordinating long-term support for digital humanities resources at their institutions. By exploring both the assumptions and practices that govern host support, from the grant-stage to the post-launch period, we hoped to gain a clearer understanding of the systems currently in place and to identify examples of good practice.

Over the course of this study, Ithaka S+R interviewed more than 125 stakeholders and faculty project leaders at colleges and universities within the US. These interviews included a deep-dive phase of exploration focused on support for the digital humanities at four campuses—Columbia University, Brown University, Indiana University Bloomington, and University of Wisconsin-Madison. This research helped us to better understand how institutions are navigating issues related to the sustainability of DH resources and what successful strategies are emerging.

Research for this study began in October 2012 and involved two stages:

- *Phase 1, Sector-Wide Research*: Interviews and desk research with stakeholders at a variety of higher education institutions (public and private, teaching- and research-focused, large universities and small liberal arts colleges) provided an overview of the practices and expectations of digital humanities project leaders, funders, and their university administrators, as well as the challenges and successes they have encountered along the way.

- *Phase II, Deep-Dive Research*: More extensive analysis of four institutions that have created and managed several of their own digital projects allowed us to develop a map of the full scope of their activities, the value they offer to the host university, and the dynamics that drive decision making around the role the university plays in supporting them.

Unlike many other recipients of Digital Implementation Grants who are developing digital tools and online resources, the primary deliverable for this grant is a white paper to share findings from our work. We refer our readers to that paper, *Sustaining the Digital Humanities: Host Institution Support beyond the Start-Up Phase*, for the most comprehensive discussion of methodology and lessons learned. In this paper, we are pleased to have the opportunity to reflect further on the project as a project, and to consider its challenges and impacts.

- The URL for the final report is: http://www.sr.ithaka.org/sites/default/files/SR_Supporting_Digital_Humanities_20140618f.pdf
- The URL for the *Sustainability Implementation Toolkit* is: http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/sustainability-implementation-toolkit

Lessons learned and changes in course

During the course of the study we chose to modify the methodology due to both a sharpening of the focus on institutional models and an awareness of the difficulty in collecting reliable financial data. This shift resulted in our conducting more case profiles and more interviews, but in collecting less financial data than first planned.

- *Landscape focus on campus profiles*. Our initial plan for our landscape review was to interview 20-25 individuals at institutions across the United States, in faculty, administration, and department head roles. As we sharpened our focus on institutional strategies, we decided to use the landscape phase of our research to create profiles of a dozen campuses. Rather than interviewing individuals specifically by job role, we chose campuses to profile and then sought key individuals on those campuses.
- *Expanded from two deep dives to four*. We conducted four deep profiles, instead of two, as originally planned. This afforded us a greater understanding of both the common and the unique challenges faced by universities in this area, making it possible for us to describe in our report three campus "models" for supporting DH, while remaining attentive to the influences that local idiosyncrasies can have when adopting any one of these models.
- *De-emphasized cost data*. An initial goal of the study was to quantify the cost—to the PIs, to their host institutions, to granting agencies—of creating and sustaining digital humanities resources. The motivation for attempting this was to develop a view of all the resources already being spent on doing this work in an ad hoc fashion. Between the time of the grant proposal and our undertaking the work, however, we had completed another study [IMLS-funded case studies of digitized special collections and an ARL-funded survey of digitized special collections] that had allowed us to do further cost data gathering, specifically at some institutions, including academic libraries with special collections. This exercise, as well as our experience in interviewing staff and faculty for this project, made it painfully clear that accurate cost data would be difficult to obtain, as in most cases neither faculty nor library staff were in the habit of tracking the time they were devoting to specific digital projects. We did gather some data concerning budgets in our faculty surveys, but chose to focus on the larger issue of which units were devoting time to specific activities, and determining whether or not they were doing so on an in-kind or paid basis.

- *Shifted timing of campus meetings*. The initial plan was to visit each campus twice, first for interviews with senior administrators and support staff, and later on, to interview faculty once the survey results had been analyzed. Due in part to the challenges of scheduling these sessions around holidays and campus schedules, we opted to conduct most faculty interviews via phone, to get to them more quickly. This turned out to be an even better plan; the second campus meetings were then devoted to sharing back our findings and hosting facilitated sessions with groups of stakeholders. These sessions offered us valuable feedback on our findings, and also were in some cases run as workshops, where senior administrators, faculty and unit heads actively discussed the roles they currently play and how they see their own systems developing to better manage the demands of faculty and the work they create.

Perhaps the most difficult question was how to define the particular flavor of "digital humanities" we would examine. Did we care about all the shapes and sizes that DH engagement comes in, or just in the large-scale digital outputs that seem to garner the most attention and funding? In the end, we developed a method we hoped would acknowledge and capture data on the widespread interest in digital humanities, while also identifying practitioners who are actually building and managing long-term resources. The survey was directed at all faculty in a few departments selected by our campus-based partners (often based in the library) and we tried to get as broad participation as possible. But the survey also sought to identify those among the respondents who had managed or created digital projects that they considered to be for public use and that were expected to need ongoing support and development. This approach worked for the most part, but while we were eager to learn more about those major, public digital research initiatives, we soon realized that campus leaders still need a better understanding of what faculty (and even students) are doing, and to what extent those other activities generate materials that will require a support strategy.

We hope that those who choose to undertake a campus-based survey for themselves will consider ways to capture more data about the sorts of files, formats, and intentions of even those practitioners whose work is not intended for public use. In other words, while we focused on a particular use case that is known to create significant sustainability challenges, there are many faculty and students who are creating other types of resources and data that may also pose challenges over the long-term, and the survey could prompt respondents to offer greater detail about that work so that a better-informed and finer-tuned system of support could be developed.

Accomplishments

The paper and toolkit were published on June 18, 2014 and represent the final deliverables from this grant. In the course of conducting the study and developing the paper and tools, we had several accomplishments worth emphasizing:

- We undertook and completed four full campus profiles, twice as many as original proposed, by altering the methodology used to focus less on gathering cost data and more on understanding process and strategy.
- Our original estimate was to interview about 45 people in the course of this project. In the end, we interviewed over 125 individuals, including some more than once.
- We held on-campus meetings to share back our findings and discuss them with campus stakeholders. Each campus partner was offered a short menu of types of events we might host for them. This phase of the project was extremely productive; rather than just providing us with feedback on our work (though they served this purpose, also), in many cases, the sessions ended up being a good neutral ground for people across campus to begin to have substantive conversations about how to better coordinate their activities. Several times, we were told that meetings like that were very valuable but "just don't happen." It may take some time to see the results from this work; we will continue to track evidence of people and teams using this approach to develop their own campus-based strategies.
- Our marketing team developed lists of contacts and communications to disseminate the report and the toolkit. An announcement was sent to 3,239 contacts, including US library deans and directors, digital humanities centers, digital humanists, publishers, and higher education and libraries media. Additionally, the announcement was posted on the ACRL Digital Humanities Interest Group listserv, the ACRL Sustainability listserv, and on Ithaka S+R's blog and Twitter account.

Audiences

The readership for this report includes several groups. While it is too soon after publication to have a full picture of the impact the paper and toolkit will have, we expect the readership to include:

- *Library administrators and DH coordinators.* We see as the main audience for this report those in the library who manage digital projects, whether for the library's own collections or as a service to faculty to come to the library for support. We have heard from some library directors that the report will be useful to them and others who are considering developing DH strategies for themselves. In just the last week, we have heard from an AUL for technology at a major research institution (Wisconsin) and a head of a liberal arts college publishing program (Amherst) who reported that they had shared the report widely with campus colleagues.
- *DH practitioners.* Faculty who are engaged in building digital projects of their own will be one of our audiences here, too. As many of the initiatives to gain further funding to support staff hires, technology capacity and education for practitioners are lead by faculty members, we believe that the report will provide them with the tools they need to gather

data on the nature of the need on their campus, and to have structured conversations with administrators about possible paths forward.

- *Heads of other related units on campus:*Many units on campus, from digital humanities centers to technology or visualization groups, to the university press are or could be participating in the process of creating and managing the new digital research resources being created on campus. While digital humanities centers seem to the obvious leader in these discussions, we hope that the paper encourages a discussion about the roles that the DH center does assume, and important roles that others will need to take on.

- *Senior administrators (deans, provosts).* Our research made clear that in most places, this issue is only beginning to emerge at the highest levels of administration, and yet the instances of greatest coordinated investment only occur with support from the top. We hope that senior administrators will find this to be a useful paper for framing the issues, and we imagine that library directors and faculty will direct them to it for this purpose.

The reach of this report and this topic is nation-wide and even international. While geographic differences do exist concerning institutional strategy, the tools offer here are easily translatable to other settings.

A complete list of interviewees is available in the appendices of final report, starting on page 67. In total, we spoke with 126 individuals from 23 institutions of higher education and 5 other organizations, such as funding agencies. Those institutions included 10 public and 13 private universities and colleges. While most were research universities, 6 were liberal arts colleges.

In terms of outreach, within the first ten days of publication (June 18 – June 28), we had 1578 total page views of the final report, which has been downloaded 567 times. There have been 986 page views for the *Toolkit*, and various elements of the kit were downloaded 346 times. Social media has played d a significant role in spreading the word about this publication. The initial Ithaka S+R announcement was re-tweeted 34 times, reaching 21,473 followers. Another 57 people and organizations tweeted independently about the project, and those tweets were re-tweeted 71 times, for a total reach of 397,686.

Evaluation

The project was supported by an advisory committee, which included Richard Detweiler, President, Great Lakes Colleges Association; Martin Halbert, Dean of Libraries, University of North Texas; Stanley N. Katz, Director, Center for the Arts and Cultural Policy Studies; Lecturer with rank of Professor, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs; President Emeritus of the American Council of Learned Societies; Maria C. Pantelia, Professor, Classics, University of California, Irvine; Director, Thesaurus Linguae Graecae®; Richard Spies, Former Executive Vice President for Planning and Senior Advisor to the President at Brown University,

Former Vice President for Finance and Administration at Princeton University. Ann J. Wolpert, Director of Libraries, MIT, was a valued member of the advisory committee until her death in October 2013.

The advisory committee offered valuable guidance at key milestones throughout the project:

- A conference call on May 29, 2013 allowed us to share findings from the sector-wide research that had been completed and to select the deep dive sites.
- Feedback on the project leader questionnaire was solicited via email in September 2013, after we had refined the instrument in collaboration with the campuses coordinators.
- A conference call on December 12, 2013 served to discuss preliminary findings from the faculty surveys and to review early sketches of project lifecycles, as well as to discuss the format and emphasis of the final report.
- A final in-person meeting was held at the Ithaka S+R offices in New York on March 3, 2014. At this session, the committee reviewed draft profiles of Brown and Indiana and helped us to plan our on-campus workshops and roundtables.
- Several members of the advisory committee read full drafts of the final paper and offered detailed comments and feedback.

In addition, we received valuable feedback from members of the community at different points throughout the project, thanks to our close working relationships with our partner campuses. Meetings held at each of the four campuses permitted us to test out the ideas in the paper and those used to build the toolkit with groups of varying composition. The campus workshops included the following:

- *Columbia University*: Roundtable of several senior library directors and staff dedicated to supporting digital humanities work, including the AUL for Collections and Services, Associate VP, Digital Programs and Technology Services, the Director of the Center for Digital Research and Scholarship, Acting Executive Director for the Center for New Media Teaching and Learning. the Director, Humanities and History Libraries and the Digital Humanities Coordinator.
- *Indiana University Bloomington*: Roundtable with the Libraries Executive Council, which included the dean of the library and five associate deans; a presentation of research findings attended by about thirty people, including the majority of the Libraries Executive Council, several members of the Libraries' Digital Collections Services, a handful of faculty members who have created DH projects, and few support staff from other units around campus; finally, a library staff training session on sustainability principles attended by several members of the Libraries Executive Council, members of the Libraries' Digital Collections Services, and the reference librarians.

- *University of Wisconsin-Madison*: Key stakeholder roundtable, including the dean of the library, an AUL for library technologies, the CIO, and two associate deans in the College of Letters and Science.
- *Brown University*: Key stakeholder roundtable, including the university librarian, two AULs, the DH librarian, the deputy provost, two key administrators in other support units, and a handful of faculty with DH projects.

These sessions were structured to include a formal presentation of findings from the campus-based survey, including DH activity on campus; a review of overlaps and gaps in the current system of supporting services to digital humanities project leaders; and a facilitated discussion on the key motivators for offering DH support. The feedback from these sessions, and our observations of how the "key stakeholder" sessions helped to surface often sensitive topics in very productive ways strongly influenced the final design of the *Sustainability Implementation Toolkit*, in particular.

The broader public is just now starting to respond to the project, and we will continue to track this over the months ahead. At the Annual meeting of the Associate of American University Presses (AAUP, June 2014) a session on Publishing and Digital Humanities included a brief synopsis and discussion of the paper. At the annual meeting of the American Library Association (June 2014) a discussion of the paper is on the agenda of the ACRL interest group for digital humanities. Responses to the paper will vary for different categories of readers. DH practitioners, particularly faculty members, may find this useful as a way to raise awareness of the topic on their campuses. Some well-known DH practitioners (Alex Gil at Columbia and Trevor Muñoz at MITH) were recently quoted in "When Digital Projects End," an article in Inside Higher Education, devoted to the study. Gil pointed out that "The report does a fine job of teasing out the diversity of support approaches at different universities…Now that they have brought this level of detail to the conversation, I hope we can begin expanding the concept of support that the study assumes to include the learning of faculty, students and librarians. Nothing in my estimate will support digital scholarship and allow it to endure constant technological change -- on any campus -- more than shared knowledge."[1]

Continuation and Long Term Impact

Unlike some of the other grantees in this program, this paper is considered to be the end product of a successful research project, so there are no immediate plans to continue the project itself. Ithaka S+R will continue to host the paper and the toolkit, and to promote it through webinars and other speaking engagements that we participate in. The papers that Ithaka S+R publishes

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[1] Carl Straumsheim, "When Digital Projects End," Inside Higher Ed, June 26, 2014. http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/06/26/study-preserve-digital-resources-institutions-should-play-their-strengths

tend to remain relevant over many years, so we have reason to believe that the readership of this work will continue to grow, as we continue to promote it.

As a result of the project we came to know the senior library and DH leaders at the four campuses we worked most closely with, Columbia, Brown, Indiana and Wisconsin. These relationships have been wonderfully productive, not just for the paper, but in other ways as well. We are developing a training course, for example, and may now end up partnering with Columbia in future years. This grant gave us license to speak with many of the leaders of the DH community, and this led to other possible partnerships, as well. It has been a pleasure getting to know many of the library directors, faculty, senior administrators and other departmental heads, and these relationships will certainly last well beyond the end of the grant.

We have started to hear of some encouraging illustrations of the impacts the process has had for those campuses we partnered with for this study. According to University Librarian Harriette Hemmasi of Brown University, "The process at Brown heightened insight among the various stakeholders about the ways in which we see ourselves and each other as part of the campus infrastructure that supports digital humanities and digital scholarship, more generally. It also provided an impetus for increased collaboration, resulting in an award from the Provost to fund a two-year Digital Humanities Lecture Series, including at least one short-term Scholar-in-Residence each year." According to Lee Konrad, Associate University Librarian, Technology Strategies and Data Services at University of Wisconsin-Madison, "The process helped to illustrate both the pros and cons of supporting [DH-related] work in a highly decentralized manner. I came away feeling that while this type of support model has its challenges, it also has great rewards in that it brings together scholars, technologists, and librarians from across the campus in ways that might be difficult in a highly structured environment. The process gave us a very important opportunity to work together at administrative levels, and …to discuss engaging in sustainable digital humanities work at scale."

In addition, as is often the case, while this project has answered some questions it has also suggested others in need of further investigation. For example, it became clear that there is much more to discuss concerning what it means to "publish" or "disseminate" one's work. Many campus roundtables with library staff and faculty suggested that posting materials in a campus repository was all that was needed. And yet, we heard very little about significant impact or efforts to build audience for these projects and even where there was a university press on campus, it was not generally considered a key player. We hope to further explore this topic, by working with members of the Association of American University Presses as well as with Library publishing units that are starting to play a role in this area.

Grant Products

During the course of this grant, we wrote and published the final report, entitled *Sustaining the Digital Humanities: Host Institution Support beyond the Start-up Phase* as well as the *Sustainability Implementation Toolkit*. Both are freely available and hosted on the Ithaka S+R website: http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/sustaining-digital-humanities

- *Sustaining the Digital Humanities: Host Institution Support beyond the Start-Up Phase* http://www.sr.ithaka.org/sites/default/files/SR_Supporting_Digital_Humanities_20140618f.pdf

- *Sustainability Implementation Toolkit* http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/sustainability-implementation-toolkit

  The toolkit outlines three key phases, each including several downloadable files:

  Step One: Assess the Landscape (http://www.sr.ithaka.org/content/assess-landscape)
  - Survey of Faculty Creation of Digital Content, Tools, and Infrastructure
  - Customizing and Implementing the Survey
  - Interview Guide: Directors of Support Units
  - Interview Guide: Senior Administrators
  - Interview Guide: Digital Project Leaders

  Step Two: Identify Overlaps and Gaps (http://www.sr.ithaka.org/content/identify-overlaps-and-gaps)
  - Analyzing the Data Gathered
  - Overlaps and Gaps Worksheet

  Step Three: Discuss and Address Institutional Priorities (http://www.sr.ithaka.org/content/discuss-and-address-institutional-priorities)
  - Hosting a Stakeholder Roundtable
  - Stakeholder Roundtable: Presentation Template

  Additional features of the *Toolkit* include:

  - A Briefing Paper for Digital Project Leaders (http://www.sr.ithaka.org/sites/default/files/BRIEFING_PAPER.pdf)
  - Intake Questionnaire for New Digital Projects http://www.sr.ithaka.org/sites/default/files/IntakeQuestionnaire.pdf