A Digital Humanities Reading List: Part 2, Cooperation Between Libraries and Research Communities

LIBER's Digital Humanities & Digital Cultural Heritage Working Group is gathering literature for libraries with an interest in digital humanities.

Four teams, each with a specific focus, have assembled a list of must-read papers, articles and reports. The recommendations in this article (the second in the series) have been assembled by the team in charge of Cooperation and Relationship Between Libraries and Research Communities, led by Liam O'Dwyer of Dublin City University.

The Second Theme: Cooperation Between Libraries & Research Communities

As Digital Humanities (DH) evolves, the role of libraries and librarians working in the field continues to develop. A core factor in realising the opportunities that DH presents for libraries – and that libraries present for DH – is the level and nature of cooperation between libraries and their research communities. How do libraries find their DH research communities? How do we let 'them' find 'us'? How are these connections best facilitated and fostered?

A significant body of literature focuses on this aspect of DH Librarianship and this post results from an appropriately collaborative attempt to list must-reads.

1. **The Digital in the Humanities: An Interview with Bethany Nowviskie**
   [In Melissa Dinsman's interview](), Nowviskie identifies the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) as being of most benefit to DH. Expertise in digitisation, data curation, digital stewardship, metadata, discovery and data visualisation and analysis are called out as key offerings. These are augmented by the established liaison and consultative roles of libraries.

2. **Communicating New Library Roles to Enable Digital Scholarship: A Review Article, John Cox**
   In his consideration of academic libraries' approaches to DH, [Cox]() notes the importance of language and terminology in broadcasting skillsets, for example in job titles and team names. It may be more apt for the Library to present itself as partner or collaborator as opposed to service or support provider. Cox calls for a focused communications strategy to embed libraries in digital scholarship and create new perceptions of their role as enabling partners, one *"that focuses on inserting the library into digital scholarship communities, mirroring their experimental mindset, and projecting a confident, 'can-do' outlook"*.

3. **No Half Measures: Overcoming Common Challenges to Doing Digital Humanities in the Library, Miriam Posner and Digital Humanities in the Library isn't a Service, Trevor Munoz**
   [Posner]() also acknowledges the importance of language and framing. She concurs with [Trevor Munoz]() who argues that *support* may be unsuited to DH where projects typically need collaborators rather than supporters. In her piece, Posner identifies recurring challenges and opportunities for libraries working in DH and

investigates common factors of success and failure. Among her conclusions are the importance of institutional commitment and openness to new models and workflows.

4. **Evolving in Common: Creating Mutually Supportive Relationships Between Libraries and the Digital Humanities, Micah Vandegrift & Stewart Varner**
In this piece Vandegrift and Varner use texts by Lisa Spiro, Matthew Kirschenbaum, Stephen Ramsay and Bethany Nowviskie to present and discuss a variety of perspectives on the subject of library engagement in DH. They emphasise the need for deep collaboration and echo the importance of acting as equal partner and overcoming any reluctance or "timidity" in this regard. The potential of library as space is signaled as particularly pertinent for DH activity and relationship building

5. **Building Capacity for Digital Humanities, ECAR Working Group**
The ECAR working group paper outlines categories to assess institutions in terms of capacity and readiness for DH and suggests practical approaches and next steps. Different structural approaches to facilitate DH collaboration are explored – centralised, hub and spoke, mesh and consortial. They stress the importance of local context in their consideration of how to best foster DH growth. The ECAR recommendation of a tailored approach recurs frequently in this literature, responding to the local DH environment, available resources and strategic goals. Performing a needs assessment or environmental scan is repeatedly advocated as an appropriate first step to inform how a library should engage with its researchers.

6. **Research Libraries & Digital Humanities Tools, RLUK**
RLUK's report on The role of Research Libraries in the creation, archiving, curation, and preservation of tools for the Digital Humanities documents the outcomes of a survey of UK research libraries, presenting a broad range of models used and approaches taken. It reinforces views found elsewhere here, such as the cautioning against a one-size-fits-all approach and the shifting role of libraries from service provider to active participant.

7. **Digital Humanities In the Library / Of the Library, Caitlin Christian-Lamb, Sarah Potvin & Thomas Padilla**
ACRL's 2016 special issue Digital Humanities In the Library / Of the Library contains many articles broaching the topic of research

cooperation. [Do DH Librarians Need to be in the Library?: Librarianship in Academic Units](#) by Locke and Mapes explores how models of embedded librarianship within a faculty can help position the Librarian as an active partner. Other articles discuss the task of bringing library DH labour to light. [When](#) [Metadata Becomes Outreach](#) focuses on the importance of communicating library skills, where metadata can become *"the heartbeat making DH projects usable, robust, preservable, sustainable, and scalable".* In another piece, by [Huculack and Goddard,](#) a tension is identified between priorities – the scholar focusing on theory/prototype/output and the librarian on practice/preservation/standardisation.

8. **The Reciprocal Benefits of Library Researcher-in-Residence Programs**, **Virginia Wilson**
   [This paper](#) looks at how use of library research-in-residence programs can enhance the research culture of the library and help foster a collaborative culture between library and faculty.

9. **Digital Humanities: What Can Libraries Offer? Shun Han Rebekah Wong**
   [Wong](#) undertakes a quantitative analysis of authorship in DH journals to investigate library involvement in the field. She present libraries as central to DH realizing its potential while acknowledging complexity and challenges of relationship building.

10. **Special Report: Digital Humanities in Libraries, Stewart Varner and Patricia Hswe**
   Varner and Hswe's 2016 survey and report of [Digital Humanities in Libraries](#) reflects uncertainty in how to best respond to the expanding scope of activity in the field. Many themes and recommendations recur: an engaged, agile, responsive approach, leveraging of existing library strengths.

11. **The Research Librarian of the Future: Data Scientist and Co-investigator**
   LSE's [The Research Librarian of the Future](#) looks at emerging roles and opportunities for liaison librarians. Meeting emerging research requirements (e.g. around data) can drive collaboration, another example of the agile approach – looking for researchers' knowledge gaps and where they overlap with library strengths. The need for a strategic approach, supporting upskilling and committing resources, is highlighted.

It is somewhat reassuring that across these writings there are recurring themes, and interesting to see how they relate and intersect. Library skills and functions are a natural fit for DH, yet a reframing of roles can help communicate their relevance to the field. DH offers great potential as an area of growth but strategic alignment and commitment of resourcing are essential for that potential to be realised. While it may no longer be *new*, DH remains decidedly *different* in the challenges and opportunities it poses for libraries – and particularly how libraries and researchers collaborate. Posner acknowledges the reality of much DH scholarship as *"eccentric, unpredictable, bespoke, and prone to failure. It will not match up neatly with a library's existing workflows".* These truths, however unpalatable to the DH-enthused librarian, indicate that libraries need to adjust and experiment to succeed here. As Posner again puts it, *"DH is not, and cannot be, business as usual for a library"*

For further reading there are of course many more comprehensive listings than this post covers. In the course of our discussions, the following were mentioned:

- Miriam Posner's [Digital Humanities and the Library](#)
- The ACRL's dh+lib [list of relevant readings on DH+Libraries](#)