

Chapter 1

Digitizing the Humanities: A Future for Libraries

Mandi Shepp

Marion H. Skidmore Library, USA

ABSTRACT

Scholarship in the humanities is rapidly becoming digital, and patrons expect libraries to offer new resources. The influence of Web 2.0, especially social media, amplifies these changes and enhances digital scholarship. The collaborative creation of digital collections allows libraries to modernize their available resources while encouraging dynamic patron participation in the educational process through initiatives like crowdsourcing. The developing digital elements of humanities scholarship and how they can be affected by the participatory web is examined through discussion and review of literature, and applied and observed through a case study of The Skeptiseum, a digital museum of physical artifacts, and how digitization contributes to modern scholarship in the humanities.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarship is changing. Researchers are increasingly relying upon digital sources to find primary information, and expect libraries and other academic centers to provide electronic content. These new expectations particularly ring true in the humanities, where scholars who were previously known for being solitary in their efforts have begun clamoring for collaboration to create digital projects, readily-available digital collections, and born-digital materials. Enter the term *digital humanities* – a phrase referring to this rapidly developing side of the humanities; one which deals directly with the combination of traditional humanities disciplines and technological advancement and focuses on creation, education, research, and scholarship. With the influx of these new expectations and technologies, how do libraries adapt?

Libraries must understand academic researchers' evolving expectations, and be prepared to change alongside scholars. Only by adapting with its patrons can a library fulfill its duties to patrons, providing information and resources. The humanities and libraries, particularly academic libraries, are important to one another, and the digital transformation of both entities has only enhanced the necessity of libraries to researchers in the humanities.

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Libraries should be prepared for the evolution of scholarship towards a place where they will be needed to guide researchers toward new digital materials, ideas, and collections. Digitization and the collaboration that often comes as the result of many digital humanities projects, opens doors for an institution, resulting in more publicity, donors, and patron traffic. Digital projects are an excellent way to maximize display space; rarely-displayed items that are usually locked away in archives or storage can be given a fresh new chance to be utilized, and fragile items that cannot be displayed under normal conditions can once again be appreciated by patrons and digitally scrutinized by scholars. Digitization can also allow extensive collections which are too cumbersome for normal display options to finally be displayed together again as a whole.

This chapter is meant to help with navigating digital collections, digital humanities, and the library's roles within this developing world. Readers will become familiar with basics of digital collection creation, options for funding digital content creation, and the hallmarks of good digital collections.

After completing this chapter, you will be able to meet the following objectives:

1. Gain a better understanding of digital humanities and its importance to libraries.
2. Learn the fundamentals of creating a humanities-oriented digital collection.
3. Understand how to use Web 2.0 and social media within the digital humanities.
4. Become familiar with the types of funding options and collaboration opportunities available to digital humanities collections and projects.
5. Learn about successful digital humanities collections and how they have enhanced scholarship.
6. Feel better prepared for embarking on a digital humanities project within your institution.

BACKGROUND

Research has revealed that the general public is also a powerful audience for digital collections, indicating growing expectations from K-12 users as well as non-scholars and amateur researchers (Dalbello, 2009, p. 9). Additionally, Kim (2012, p. 149) and Dunlap (2008, p. 136) have both shown that advancements in mobile display technology (i.e. getting information on tablets or smart phones) have sparked a rising demand for mobile access to digital collections. Kamada (2012), has demonstrated that computer analysis of data allows humanities researchers to access and interpret larger amounts of data in new ways, and that libraries “have to play a pivotal role in access to primary resources if they want to stay relevant in academic research in the current information-rich environment,” (p. 484). Libraries want to provide relevant and valuable information to their patrons, whether they are schoolchildren or humanities scholars. Technology plays a vital part in the dissemination of this information. Physical collections and the institutions that house them are trusted resources for humanities scholars; it is paramount that these collections are fully available to researchers on a digital level.

“Digital content is capable of being rapidly integrated into derivative forms, formulated into building blocks for research and study, and assimilated into more complex frameworks and online learning systems,” (Dunlap, 2008, p. 135). Due to the importance of primary sources, digital collections are particularly relevant in humanities research; libraries cannot ignore this shift in access demands, and studies show that libraries have responded positively to this change – evidenced by their increased production of electronic materials. The Institute of Museum and Library Services reported in 2002 that 34 percent of academic libraries reported digitization activities in the previous year, with a follow-up study in 2004

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