Chapter 6
Digital Humanities and Librarians:
A Team-Based Approach to Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter details the development and implementation of an Introduction to Digital Humanities course (ENGL 695) at Kansas State University (K-State). The course originated with a tenure-track professor with a research specialty in British Romantic-period Literature and the digital humanities. In conjunction with a host of librarians at K-State Libraries, a course was developed that drew on both library resources and librarian knowledges and skills. Over the course of the semester, the professor and the students worked closely with librarians in many areas of the library, including public services, technical services and special collections. The result was four innovative and sustainable digital projects that highlighted the resources and research interests at K-State. In addition to introducing students to the digital humanities, the course also served to establish a framework for future initiatives, including hosting a digital humanities symposium and establishing a digital humanities center.

BACKGROUND

Digital Humanities (DH) is a rapidly expanding and increasingly important area of scholarship that leverages digital media and its associated methodologies and pedagogies across the humanisitic field of inquiry. The last decade has witnessed the rapid expansion of DH and its integration into the academy with more and more universities establishing digital humanities centers that provide technical and human

support to humanities scholars who often work in collaboration on digital projects. ITHAKA reports that as of February 2014, the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations had 175 registered institutions, illustrating a significant increase from the 114 registered institutions in 2011 (Maron & Pickle, 2014, p. 2). University libraries often play a key role in the implementation, creation, and sustainment of these centers (Kamada 2010, p. 484). The university library acts as a neutral place for this burgeoning, interdisciplinary field that, according to Svensson (2012), "is intimately associated with a fairly pronounced and far-reaching visionary discourse and transformative sentiment" (p. 2).

There is concern among practitioners in the field that the very core of DH, its interdisciplinarity, could be its downfall. However, Smithies (2014) contends that if preventive measures are taken, the field will thrive. He asserts:

The field needs to find intellectual levers that can make sense of a very broad definitional continuum, and explain to stakeholders what DH is, how it is connected to the current difficulties encountered by the humanities, how it is connected to broader postindustrial culture, and how technical DH outputs should be assessed. Without answers to these issues the field is unlikely to gain either high levels of student engagement, or a portion of the increasingly competitive funding sources. (p. 3)

Given the contentious nature of DH, libraries can not only play a role in terms of place, but also in communicating and, in a sense, marketing DH to the larger campus community.

As with traditional humanities disciplines, the loci of DH are the various artifacts that comprise our cultural heritage, from codices to print media, from graphic representation to video media. Yet, in terms of methodological approach, DH departs from the dominant strain of traditional humanities research because it is "collaborative and project based, and such processes and deliverables (including different kinds of digital publications) may not have a clear place in the reward and support systems of the academy" (Svensson, 2012, p. 5). Whereas scholars in the sciences are expected to have several authors on one publication/grant/product, humanities scholars tend to pursue single authored outcomes. In the context of collaboration, libraries can play a role in transforming the culture of humanities scholarship by demonstrating the value of not only multi-authored scholarship but also its multidisciplinarity. In this way, the library and DH "can thus become a platform or means for rethinking the humanities and higher education and a way of channeling transformative sentiment that often goes far beyond the digital humanities proper" (Svensson, 2012, p. 5).

Academia is already embracing DH in terms of the computational ability it brings to bear on the preservation, access and dissemination of traditional forms of media. For example, many of the search processes are being conducted almost exclusively in an online environment (Berry, 2012). As researchers become more adept at accessing and consuming information in an electronic environment, their expectations of that kind of searchability and remote access increases (Clement, Hagenmaier, & Knies, 2013, p. 124). This behavioral and attitudinal change increases the relevance and necessity of the library in the creation and dissemination of both research support and scholarship.

DH can be employed to revolutionize both librarianship and humanities scholarship as it not only enhances research potentiality through the representation and re-representation of physical artifacts, their preservation and dissemination in networked environments, but also encourages the creation of born-digital artifacts that offer new ways of thinking about our cultural heritage and the methodologies we use to interpret and preserve it. Berry (2012) corroborates these ideas when he asserts that:

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