Hybrid and Fluid by Design: Collective Capacity Building for the Digital Humanities at Penn State

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Drops on green #2 by Stefan Lins CC BY 2.0 via Flickr
WSU Vancouver's Electronic Literature Lab

I recently had the pleasure of being invited to visit Dene Grigar’s Creative Media & Digital Culture (CMDC) program at Washington State University, Vancouver. In addition, I finally got to experience her fabled Electronic Literature Lab (ELL). The ELLs, or what on first glance looks more like a Macintosh museum, boasts what is undoubtedly the world’s finest collection of electronic literature. Dene has in her possession much of the canon’s earliest works, maintained in near-mint condition. To my
Focal Points

• Our local context
• *Hybrid, fluid, and collective* — defined, enacted
  • Publishing and Curation Services
  • Initiatives, programs, funding
• Digital Humanities at Penn State
• Challenges and opportunities

Focal point by Thomas Leth-Olsen
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• Not an expert in org structure
• Organic coalescence but also “undepartment”
• Credit to Barbara Dewey, Mike Furlough, Chris Long
OUR LOCAL CONTEXT
Basic Organizational Data

• Land-grant institution
  • 24 campuses “geographically dispersed” and World Campus (online program)
• 100,000 students and 17,000 faculty
• 23 campus libraries and University Park (UP — main campus) library
  • At UP: Eleven subject libraries; special collections library; news & microforms library; and lots of departments
Also vacant is the AD for Technology, Discovery, and Digital Services – new role on Dean’s administrative team
HYBRID, FLUID, AND COLLECTIVE — DEFINED, ENACTED

“Fluid” by zeitfaenger.at CC BY 2.0 via Flickr
Hybrid

“Derived from heterogeneous or incongruous sources; having a mixed character; composed of two diverse elements; mongrel.”


Corn Color Blast by Reza CC BY 2.0 via Flickr
Hybridity as a Type of Complexity

“. . . a key variable that stimulates creativity is organizational complexity, and the critical component of organizational complexity is diversification of knowledge.”

“HYBRID” & “FLUID” APPLIED — HOW PUBLISHING AND CURATION SERVICES (PCS) WAS FORMED

• Merged two departments (Scholarly Communication Services and Digital Curation Services) in 2012
  • Two co-leads instead of a single department head
    • Linda Friend
    • Patricia Hswe
  • Only other staff then — graduate assistant
    • 2013: Project Associate
Publishing and Curation Services in 2014

Scholarly communication, publishing, data curation, digital collections, and digital humanities

- Co-Lead and Head, Scholarly Publishing
- Co-Lead & Head, ScholarSphere User Services

- Publishing Services Web Developer
- Scholarly Publishing Associate
- Digital Humanities Research Designer
- Digital Scholarship Services Graduate Assistant
- Project Coordinator, The People’s Contest
- Social Sciences Data Curation Fellow

- Essentially multi-purpose digital scholarship collaborative -
Close collaborations across Libraries
What PCS Is Doing — A Selection

• Publishing services
• Repository service program/infrastructure
• DH program/research infrastructure
• People’s Contest Project
• Planning/development of services around restricted-use data

• Digital project planning/process/management
• Digital preservation strategy
• Inreach & outreach —
  • Data management
  • Scholarly communication
  • Online professional presence
How heterogeneous, mixed, diverse?

- Leadership
- Positions / “Functional” expertise
- Subject experts (research “know-how”)
- Technology / Infrastructure expertise
- So hybrid, that: debatable where PCS sits/should sit in overall org structure

How adaptable, flexible?
PCS in 2014 (toward an org chart)*

(*currently reports in interim to AD for Collections, Information & Access Services; in 2015 will report either to AD for Research or to AD for Technology)

Co-Lead and Head, Scholarly Publishing

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- Publishing Services Web Developer
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Physically distributed — blending permanent, fixed-term, full-time & part-time staff
Less the spaces and services than staffing & structure — at least first

“The real innovation though was the organizational structure behind it. The spaces are part of Digital Research Services which brings together, into one department, specialists from GIS, Data Services, Digital Libraries and the Digital Repository. More importantly, it creates a connection point between the resources found in the hub and all the other library departments.”

— Stewart Varner, ACRL Digital Humanities Interest Group listserv, December 3, 2014
Convergence around Digital Humanities / Digital Scholarship

- Sally W. Kalin Early-Career Librarianships
- Liberal Arts Scholarship & Technology Summit (LASTS)
- Partnership between University Libraries & College of Liberal Arts

“All power to the collectives” by mike.beneditti
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"At the root of cooperative scholarship is the recognition that faculty have much to learn and students have much to teach.

“Faculty-student collaboration is reciprocal and asymmetrical.”
DIGITAL HUMANITIES AT PENN STATE

DH by Quinn Dombrowski CC BY-SA 2.0 via Flickr
The “I” Word

@miriamkp: “You’re ready to dig in and want to test something out . . . All the server administrators have to do is give you some server space. And the next thing you know, it’s five years later and you’re still hammering out details of the M.O.U. and wondering what happened to the person you used to be.”

Lack of sustainability

Lack of policy
Pedagogy and Scholarship

• Introduction to the Digital Humanities
• Computing Fundamentals for Humanities Scholars
• Computational Stylistics
• Network Analysis
• Digital Scholarly Editing
• Content Management Systems for the Humanities
• Introduction to Git
Fall 2014
DH Seminar Series
@briancroxall: “New jobs and fellowships presuppose undergraduates who have been and will be introduced to conversations of the digital humanities as well as humanities faculty who will teach them.”

http://www.briancroxall.net/events/
Faculty Initiatives

Seed funding from Liberal Arts

• Women’s Writings in 19th-Century France
• The Exegesis Project
Holistic Approach to DH

- Collaborate actively
- Share expertise
- Build capacities
- Enhance scholarship
Spring & Summer 2015 Plans

• Digital Literary Studies course for undergrads
• Workshop series on digital project lifecycle
• Undergrad DH research pilot program
• Research design for seed-funded projects
• Assessment of fall DH Seminar Series, for improving next fall series
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES
Challenges

• Resourcing, fostering, scaling, managing
• Buy-in while in beta
• Growing a peer community - “relationship infrastructure”
• What is what, and whose is whose?
• Branding / identity - “Center envy”? 

Cyril the squirrel up for a challenge . . .
by Brian Snelson CC BY 2.0
Opportunities

• Recent hires, new AD hires in 2015
• Depth (specialist) + breadth (generalist)
• Center for Humanities and Information
• Endowed, early-career positions
• Pilot projects!

http://chi.la.psu.edu/
Questions?
Comments?

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