Assessing the Digital Humanities Working Group Projects at the University of Florida

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Introduction

Academic libraries and teaching departments sometimes treat digital humanities (DH) as radically new. While DH is markedly innovative in terms of collaborative practices and methods, it is also fundamentally rooted in the humanities and intricately connected to core activities by librarians, especially for collaboration.

At the University of Florida (UF), the Smathers Libraries leveraged the library digital collections—with rich technical features and content, and a robust underlying infrastructure—to examine its role in the creation of the necessary scholarly cyberinfrastructure that best supports a DH collaborative community. This paper foregrounds two projects that emerged, in part, from efforts of the growing UF Digital Humanities Working Group (DHWG), begun in 2011 and currently comprising over 300 members. This paper assesses the project deliverables of two initiatives to examine their contribution to the larger DH program goals to grow the DH community of practice (CoP).

In developing a CoP, UF follows the *first-of-kind* development: "While requests for customized services cannot typically be accommodated, service teams may consider strategically undertaking a special project if it is likely to result in a first-of-a-kind, rather than one-of-a-kind, solution, which might eventually be rolled out more widely."[1] These projects are intended to examine the DH CoP needs and align "library collections...that have been developed around academic structures that tend to obscure connections between fields of research"[2] to better use digital resources and support full socio-technical (people, policies, communities, technologies) integration. The UF Libraries have conducted activities that further the efforts of multiple interdisciplinary research groups tied to digital collections, including collaborations with teaching faculty across various academic units.

Purpose

This paper describes two collaborative DH projects, the *Developing Librarian Pilot Training Project* (DLPTP)[3] and the *Digital Humanities Bootcamp* (DH Bootcamp).[4] These efforts aimed to enhance Smathers Libraries' (Libraries) growing digital collections and related activities by targeting multiple stakeholders—instruction librarians, student users, campus-wide faculty and administrators. The DLPTP featured a librarian pilot training project designed to "re-skill" librarians increasingly required to provide digital humanities services; the DH Bootcamp's objective was to increase awareness, technical skills, and develop a community of practice with campus-wide humanities researchers.

Problem

While the Libraries have developed library digital collections to create the necessary scholarly cyberinfrastructure to support the DH collaborative community, understanding of and use of these resources remains less than ideal. As DH is lauded as a demonstration of interdisciplinarity and rich collaborative potential, outreach and training are still required to improve understanding and stimulate use.

Research Questions

The two projects aimed to create, conduct and document collaboration in DH activities. This paper seeks to answer three research questions about the projects:

1. In what ways were activities structured that assess capacity building in DH outreach projects?
2. What formative assessment instruments and activities successfully elicit and reinforce participation in DH workshops/trainings?
3. Will the DHWG activities enable an increase in interdisciplinary mentoring relationships and enable increasingly diverse proposals submitted to the UF humanities granting organizations?

This synthesis of the DH programs and assessment of the deliverables builds upon initiatives such as Turin's examination of pedagogical interventions[5] and various programmatic assessments of DH incubation at the intersection of academic libraries and digital humanities that describe efforts to develop the community of practice for growing DH initiatives.[6] In consideration of these analyses, this paper describes assessment activities conducted in two recent UF DH initiatives, evaluates their application and suggests programmatic or project-based components that were left unscrutinized by the assessment activities.

Selected Relevant Literature

The Colorado University at Boulder's (CU-Boulder) programmatic case study lays out the state of DH at CU-Boulder, presenting a campus profile, needs assessment, and model adoption for developing and sustaining a program.[7] Another article highlights the assessment considerations of a pedagogical DH initiative.[8]

In the CU-Boulder case, the authors describe an organic approach—initiated within the library's various specialist librarians who provide such services as data management, scholarly communications, metadata, and preservation and archiving, among others—succeeding as it organized and centralized library resources to support the campus community's digital humanities activities.[9] CU-Boulder established a task force that examined the university's environment and asked how to assess the extent to which the libraries cohesively harnessed the obvious and existing resources to facilitate the efforts of DH.

Issues for assessment emerging from the CU-Boulder findings include:
- the design of cross-campus partnerships that support interdisciplinary collaboration;
- how to support a collaborative graduate student network;
- how digital modalities best support methodologically diverse stakeholders including faculty and graduate students;
- how instruction currently and could potentially incorporate the transformative power of DH into pedagogy;
- how workshops remove ambivalence and anxiety around learning new skill sets; and
- the barriers that challenge faculty conducting or student participation in DH activities.

In contrast, Turin describes using DH as a pedagogical approach with the purpose of examining underused collections in the Yale University library. In this experimental course, Turin employed a hands-on approach using student effort to develop metadata for a digital collection. The students "digitally mediated"[10] Himalayan materials using an object-based teaching and learning platform.

Turin's model looked at the:
- tools that develop digital scholarship;
- interaction with socially-relevant topics;
- culturally engaging activities;
- balancing tension between tool and content; and
- sustainability of outcomes and impact for the academic community.

Turin's approach asks the poignant questions that focus on how the digital resource, the user-centric services and outreach were intertwined, and he questioned the pedagogical concerns of whether DH can deliver learning outcomes.

These approaches demonstrate ways to assess programs and projects as DH initiatives increase. The next section outlines the assessments conducted in each of the projects and analyzes their effectiveness in gauging the usefulness of the DH activities.

Background

Developing Librarian Pilot Training Project

The Digital Humanities Library Group (DHLG) was established in January 2014 as an interest group, discussion forum, and training venue. In 2015, faculty from multiple departments held discussions resulting in the creation of a graduate certificate program in the digital humanities. To support these efforts, the DHLG led development on a scholar's lab to support DH activities. The group estimated that librarians required new skills and methods to support the continuing growth of DH at UF.

The DHLG was awarded almost $5,000 for the DLTPT to conduct an 11-month intensive training for librarians in digital humanities activities using the Grimm Brothers Digital Collection.[11] Activities included learning collaborative scholarship practices, using digital humanities tools, GIS/Data visualization, TEI (Text Encoding Initiative), and metadata to collaboratively create an online exhibit. The goals of the project were to build a network of DH practitioners and consultants within the

Smathers Libraries; develop the skills of librarians with DH tools resulting in greater familiarity and competencies in data visualization, text encoding, online portfolio development, project design and project management; and add value to the Grimm Brothers collection. The grant supported visiting experts from Columbia, Carnegie Mellon, and Brown University. The development of the community was the core goal, with the activities a means for this development.

Deliverables of the DLPTP include:
- creation of an online exhibit with digital humanities components including small-scale data visualization;
- use of TEI code to enhance selected texts and encourage scholarly engagement; and
- creation of a blog to document the group's progress.

Longer-term outcomes include the use of the project as a case study for future collaborative projects and publication of peer-reviewed articles outlining the project's efforts.

DH Bootcamp
A recent initiative of the DHWG proposed to engage up to 60 first-time DH practitioners in a two-day seminar and workshop. The seminar portion provided introductory digital skills training and shared exemplar projects demonstrating new technologies, potential collaborative approaches, and outcomes assessment. Seminar presentations included an overview of scholars in "publicly engaged scholarship;" the history of and culture wars navigated with digital humanities frameworks; the advantages of digitally-native forms; and lessons to be learned from 19th century scholars about managing information.

Workshops focused on small-group interactions with diverse UF campus representation. Topics included 3-D printing and maker activities; text mining and visualization; digital collection-oriented usability testing; an introduction to TEI; GIS mapping; video creation; and "grantsmanship."

Participants were organized in small workgroups with a mix of disciplines. The Bootcamp culminated in lightning round presentations by workgroups and a post-Bootcamp reflective individual video. Benefits included heightened awareness and recognition across campus of the value of partnerships, network relationships, and the current scope of UF digital scholarship. As with the DLPTP, CoP development was the core goal of these activities.

The Bootcamp framework required both team and individual outputs including workshop attendance reporting to the team and the lightning round presentation; individual contributions included the surveys, the post-event reflective video and the online bio.

Methods Used to Gather Assessment
The purpose of examining these projects is to derive best practices in implementing DH emergent pedagogies into projects, seminars, and workshops. The two projects proposed to create, conduct, and document collaboration and both formatively and summatively assess project activities and deliverables.

Findings
UF librarians undertook new DH activities to fundamentally enrich and improve existing work including collection development, library scholarly councils, and collaboration among libraries for print and digital collections, outreach, and instruction. The project efforts were focused both inward, providing training to support new skill sets, and outward to share UF campus-wide DH activities and networks at UF and with external communities. To support overall measures and methods for assessment, the first DLPTP and Bootcamp trainings were on project charters and project management.

Both initiatives proposed formal, structured assessments that included formative and summative methods. Table 1 identifies measures that were planned or emerged, and maps activities to the planned and emerging assessments.

Project: Developing Librarian DH Pilot Training	Proposed Deliverables	Actual Deliverables	Proposed Assessment Measure	Assessment Outcome
	Short-Medium Term			
	Brothers Grimm online exhibit	Brothers Grimm online exhibit	None Proposed	Community of practice (CoP)
	TEI code to enhance selected texts	TEI coded texts	None Proposed	CoP; librarians engaged in and teaching TEI
	Blog documenting group progress	Blog entries on Tumblr and Wordpress	None Proposed	CoP
	Long Term			
	Use of the project as a case study for future collaborative projects	Completion of the project charter; adapted and used in subsequent projects	Interim group meeting to assess project charter	CoP; resulted in DH Bootcamp and increased participation in Gainesville THATCamp
	Not proposed but emerged in collaboration with multiple campus units	Development of 2-day DH Bootcamp	See program assessments below	CoP; creation of the DH Bootcamp
	Not proposed but emerged in collaboration with multiple campus units	Proposed graduate certificate in Digital Humanities	Established fall 2015	CoP; 24 students enrolled in graduate certificate
	Publication of peer-reviewed articles	Presentations proposed and delivered at conference	None planned	This article to assess DH deliverables
	Build network of DH practitioners and consultants	Changed activities for library staff, new resources and positions including scholars studio and studio facilitator	Participants' self-assessment surveys	DH Bootcamp; DH Working Group; ongoing CoP development
Program: DH Bootcamp	**Proposed Deliverables**	**Actual Deliverables**	**Proposed Assessment Measure**	**Assessment Outcome**
	Short-medium term			
	Team members attend workshops	Increased technical skills and collaborative project experiences	Post-workshop survey but did not assess attendance	N/A

Teams complete lightning round presentations	Teams create slides for presentations	Teams post slides in the IR	None to assess; no team posted slides
Team members complete pre- and post-workshop surveys	40 pre-surveys completed; 22 post-surveys completed	% of participants who complete these surveys	22 of 50 participants responded, a 44% response rate
Team members complete post-workshop 3-minute reflective video	None submitted	% of participants who submit a video	0% response rate
Team members create and share online brief bio	Team members create and share online brief bio	% of participants who created online bios	48.1% of participants completed bio
Long Term			
Increase in CHPS proposals for team-taught course grants	Team-taught courses proposed to CHPS	% of team-taught courses proposed to CHPS by Jan 2017	% of team-taught courses taught in fall 2017
UF heightened awareness of value of DH networks	Enlarged CoP	None planned	None planned
Increased DH activities across campus	DH presentations by participants at THATCamp-Gainesville	None planned	None planned
Recognition of the current scope of digital scholarship	DH Publications	DH Publications; increase on score in post-workshop survey	Multiple publications completed/in progress.
New mentoring relationships established at the Bootcamp	N/A	Post-workshop survey	Generation of this article; Libraries' Graduate Internship Program

Table 1 displays the assessments mapped to the activity's proposed deliverables, actual deliverables, the assessment proposed, and the outcome of the assessment. Each project's charter and grant proposal was examined to identify the language for both explicit and implied deliverables and projected assessments. These findings demonstrate the anticipated outcomes as well as unexpected and unexamined deliverables and outcomes.

For the DLTLP, three activities were proposed or conducted that produced short-term deliverables from two of these, including an online exhibit and TEI-enhanced texts; the third activity that was to result in a group blog was not realized with multiple tools utilized during the project. No assessments were proposed for or resulted from these activities.

For the longer term objectives, deliverables included expanded library engagement with the DHWG; focus groups for brainstorming ideas to create infrastructure and relationships; and group meetings to formatively assess the group's performance in carrying out the project charter. Two other long-term proposed deliverables include submission of peer-reviewed publications and an expanding, formal network of DH practitioners and consultants. Both of these deliverables were exceeded, especially the latter which has seen additional librarians hired for DH support roles. This article, examining the assessment of DH initiatives, serves as an additional

step in documenting research and study output, as an unplanned assessment of the peer-review publication deliverable.

Two other deliverables also emerged from the DLPTP, including the creation of the DH Bootcamp. Additionally, a graduate certificate in DH was established, with an initial seven admits to the first year of the program; currently, 24 students overall have applied for admission.

The second portion of Table 1 provides a similar listing of the DH Bootcamp's proposed and actual deliverables, and proposed assessment and assessment outcomes. The Bootcamp assessments focused on skill building, with pre- and post-workshop surveys designed to examine both the participant's familiarity and comfort with technical skills and to understand the extent of the DH environment for the participant. Other formative activities designed to assess the impact of the workshop included submission of brief biographies for inclusion on the DHWG website, lightning round presentations by the teams, Power Points created by the teams, and a post-workshop reflective video by each participant.

Five long-term outcomes were expressed in the program grant proposal and project charter. Of the five, only four were proposed. Of these four, only two were associated with proposed outcomes. One outcome that was not proposed in the materials did have a mechanism for assessment in the post-survey (the mentoring relationships).

Discussion
Analysis of Assessments Used
In the DLPTP trainings, pre-training and post-training surveys were accompanied by focus group interviews to assess the effectiveness of training. Overall scores (means based on five-point Likert scale) indicate improvement in knowledge of resources, but not necessarily competency in any. To understand level of competency, assessment may have been strengthened by comparisons of skills and perceptions, pre-training and post-training tests, with controls for variables such as discipline and tenure.

Both projects proposed digital deliverables in support of process and community development changes; assessment of the products is not within the scope of this study. For example, the DLTLP delivered TEI-encoded texts, but only the efforts were assessed but not the products.

Formative and Summative Assessment Goals
The formative and summative assessments for the DLPTP contributed to the discussion and planning of the DH Bootcamp, based on recognition of a broader community desire for DH tools, resources, and infrastructure. Conversely, the DH Bootcamp approached the two-day workshop with aggressive aspirations for pedagogical success using participant digital assignments and orientation for many first-time DH participants with featured concept-building presentations. While the qualitative content of the presentations was assured based on the speakers' expertise, the expectation of deliverables from first-time participants with unknown technical skills and limited DH exposure could have been more successful if the participants were provided support within the workshop time period to complete technical tasks.

Pedagogical Outcomes
The pedagogical tools used with the DLPTP may have benefited the DH Bootcamp in eliciting participation, given the participant's level of DH experience. However, the pre- and post-surveys provided understanding of the extent to which participants perceive the digital transformation of university archives, museums and libraries from "dusty, quiet, and mostly inanimate places where objects are preserved for posterity"[12] to innovative, desirable, and pedagogically possible communities for their engagement.

The DH Bootcamp's objectives were suitable for a program-level initiative, with emphasis on DH partnership, community, collaboration and support infrastructure concepts being presented. However, assessment requiring technical skills underestimated the ambivalence and anxiety that surrounds learning new skill sets and reflective exercises focused on little-understood DH concepts. In addition, the DH Bootcamp required a full two-day time commitment from individuals in demanding leadership roles and competed with an activity by UF's new president. Therefore, participants missed some assessment activities scheduled for the conclusion of the workshop.

Conclusion
Assessment and evaluation of DH efforts may benefit from the same type of two-pronged approach

pursued by Columbia University, in which the skills and knowledge development as well as the CoP outcomes were examined.[13] Thus, future UFDH assessment efforts will benefit by developing a structured yet iterative assessment plan, conducted systematically for each projected deliverable and outcome and for examining the engagement of both librarians and scholars in projects. Using tested frameworks supports reliability and offers comparative methodological investigation as well as an opportunity to examine differences in an unfolding disciplinary approach.

A more comprehensive comparison of DH assessment using the CU-Boulder DH data-driven assessment methods would look at the extent to which libraries cohesively harness the obvious and existing resources that can facilitate the efforts of DH but also extend the examination to integration with campus-wide needs such as cross-campus partnerships and benefits for graduate students.[14] Because the DH Bootcamp focused on conceptual presentations, even with the technical talks embedded in the workshops, the assessments should have remained focused on the larger, conceptual issues. Finally, to assure assessments that more fully capture examination of the objectives and promised deliverables, modeling and mapping strategies are recommended to provide clarity and transparency for administrators and enable stronger dissemination of results.

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Notes

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5. Mark Turin, "Devil in the Digital: Ambivalent Results in an Object-Based Teaching Course," *Museum Anthropology* 38 (2015): 123–132, http://doi.org/10.1111/muan.12088.

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7. Ibid.

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9. Ibid.

10. Turin, "Devil in the Digital," 123.

11. Suzan Alteri, "Forging a Collaborative Structure for Sustaining Scholarly Access to the Baldwin Library for Historical Children's Literature," *Institutional Repository, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida*, Mini-Grant Proposal (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 2013), http://ufdc.ufl.edu/IR00003577/00001/.

12. Turin, "Devil in the Digital," 123.

13. Nisa Bakkalbasi, Damon Jaggars, and Barbara Rockenbach, "Re-Skilling for the Digital Humanities: Measuring Skills, Engagement, and Learning," *Library Management* 36 (2015): 208–214, http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/LM-09-2014-0109.

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