

digital humanities <http://bit.ly/1Gr3Bva>

what is it?

The Digital Humanities (DH) is a relatively new and evolving multi-disciplinary model of engaging in humanistic scholarship, teaching, and lifelong learning.

DH postulates the integration of a variety of electronic media including audio, graphics, text, and video in order to permit the development of an approach to humanistic studies, which is at once less text centered and linear. DH projects encourage a new model of learning, which places collaboration above isolated individual effort.

The following organizations have been involved in the development of standards, best practices, and guidelines for DH projects:

- Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations
- Assn for Computers and the Humanities
- Canadian Centre for DH
- Canadian Research Knowledge Network
- Digital Library Federation
- Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and the Humanities
- The Humanities, Arts, Sciences and Technology Advanced Collaboratory

The Digital Humanities Summer Institute at the University of Victoria and That Camp at George Mason University provide educational opportunities for learning about DH tools and projects.



how does it work?

Digital Humanities (DH) projects use digital tools, collections, and techniques to develop, distribute, and promote knowledge.

Like traditional humanistic scholarship, DH projects are usually based on research questions that are explored through the analysis, critique, and interpretation of primary resources in archives, rare book libraries, historical societies, and museums.

However, DH projects offer additional potential by exploiting large databases of original historical sources including audio, textual, video, and graphic materials. The availability of online digital repositories has enabled the production of new and multi-layered knowledge through technology-based methodologies such as digital editing, text encoding and tagging and visualization tools.

who's doing it?

Archivists, special collections librarians, and museum curators have undertaken DH projects to increase outreach and access to their collections. In addition, scholars, students, and others in the humanities and social sciences have used DH to facilitate new methods of inquiry and research. Digital scholarship centers and services have been established in some research institutions to support DH projects. These may focus on a specific discipline or take a multi-disciplinary approach and are often located in libraries or include library staff.

Some established DH centers and projects at research organizations in Canada and the U.S., include: the Center for Digital Humanities (University of California, Los Angeles), the Centre for Digital Humanities (Ryerson University), Digital Humanities (McGill University), Digital Humanities (University of Western Ontario), Humanities Media & Computing (McMaster University), Illinois Center for Computing in Humanities Arts and Social Science (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (University of Maryland), MATIRX (Michigan State University), Orlando Project (University of Alberta), CHNM (George Mason University), and Scholars' Lab (University of Virginia).

why is it significant?

The DH is a significant development in the production and distribution of knowledge because it allows:

- simultaneous use of resources at one time or multiple views of the same resources
- users to shift the scale of materials through zooming functions
- users to alter and merge digital objects
- the use of media and methodologies that are not print based
- engagement with under- or unrepresented fields of study
- easier access to rare, unique, and fragile primary source materials in archives and rare book departments;
- the co-existence of multiple pathways within a repository;
- librarians and archivists to expand the audience and impact scholarship and knowledge mobilization.

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further reading

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Gardiner, Eileen and Ronald G. Musto. *The Digital Humanities: A Primer for Students and Scholars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

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What are the challenges?

The main challenges to developing, implementing, and maintaining DH programs are related to budgetary, training, and copyright issues. A commitment to the DH will require a different model of funding to support the work of staff and the necessary resources from multiple departments both within the library and its institution and to develop the collaborative approaches to the creation and preservation of digital objects in libraries, archives, and museums. In addition, staff will need to develop expertise in intellectual property rights in order to determine if original materials can be legally converted to digital formats. As digital objects are expensive to create and maintain, it may be difficult to preserve them at the level requisite to ensure access and integrity.

More broadly, academic and cultural institutions will need to develop less risk adverse cultures to accommodate the customized support, creative energy, and good will required of DH projects. In particular:

- The experimental quality of these projects must be recognized in order to encourage openness to the iterative and "trial and error" nature of the DH.
- The role of DH projects in the professional evaluation of scholars and librarians will need to evolve to recognize the collaborative nature of scholarly contributions to these initiatives. As the technologies used to create DH projects are just as important as their intellectual content, new assessment tools will need to be developed that go beyond the criteria used for the traditional scholarly output of printed books and journal articles.

where is it going?

As the DH matures as an approach to teaching, learning, and research and becomes a more common methodology for the humanities, the varied projects will help support exciting, new scholarly work. The multiplicity and mutability of digital objects has enabled new models of knowledge creation through digital curation, analysis of large data sets, cultural analytics, aggregation, and data mining, visualization and data design, spatial humanities, distributed knowledge, repurposed and remixed content, and gaming.

Initial enthusiasm for DH is now giving way to more realistic expectations of the role of DH in the careers of humanists and a more tempered view of the place of DH within humanities scholarship. Dedicated DH centers will continue to be established to offer technical support and skills training for digital and data manipulation processes required for DH projects. Use of "crowd sourcing" for the processing, transcription and annotation of rare and unique materials will expand. Partnerships between educational, government, and corporate organizations will enable sharing of expertise, resources, and financing.

what are the implications for libraries?

On-going support from library operation budgets will be needed for dedicated IT staff, digital humanities specialists, computing and digitization equipment, servers and specialized software, and conversion of analog to digital content. With the increased likelihood of new sources of funding available from government, corporate, and private sector agencies, libraries will need to allocate staff to writing grant proposals and managing funded projects. Staff training will be required in standards and "best practices" for data conversion, metadata creation, the use of digital tools for data mining, exhibit curation, text encoding, visualization and project management as well as copyright clearance.

The location of DH centers in libraries to utilize traditional librarian skills in cataloging, preservation and subject expertise may become necessary to support and execute DH projects. DH projects will not only put pressure for more support for rare books, archives, and special collections departments but, also will increase collaboration opportunities between librarians, archivists, scholars, students, and other stakeholders. Funding of DH projects and initiatives is a potential benefit of participation in networks of DH centres such as centerNet, Canadian Society for Digital Humanities/*Société canadienne pour les humanités numériques*, the Consortium of Humanities Centers & Institutes, and the Digital Public Library of America.

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