Digital Humanities Internships: Creating a Model iSchool-Digital Humanities Center Partnership

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Creative partnership between computer science and the humanities – what we now call "digital humanities" – is the cornerstone of the digital revolution. Cathy Davidson writes (2008) that "perhaps we need to see technology and the humanities not as a binary but as two sides of a necessarily interdependent, conjoined, and mutually constitutive set of intellectual, educational, social, political, and economic practices." Significant educational challenges exist, however, in creating a cadre of professionals who understand the intellectual context of digital humanities research and who are also capable of building the supporting infrastructure of digital collections, tools, and services (de Smedt 2002). The American Council of Learned Societies' groundbreaking report – *Our Cultural Commonwealth: Report of the Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for the Humanities and Social Sciences* – focuses attention on the need to "cultivate leadership in support of cyberinfrastructure from within the humanities and social sciences, encourage digital scholarship, develop and maintain open standards and robust tools, and create extensive and reusable digital collections" (ACLS 2006, p. 4).

An international network of digital humanities centers creates and develops access to the digital documents, images, languages, sound, and film that constitute the human record and facilitate its understanding. In a quite separate but potentially symbiotic movement, graduate schools of information in the United States and elsewhere are producing technologically sophisticated professionals with deep backgrounds in and commitments to the humanities. Schools of Information, or "iSchools" have emerged from a two-decade long era of consolidation and reform, during which traditional schools of library science struggled with irrelevancy, diminished scale, and a fundamental societal transformation in the use of new and emerging technologies (Sawyer 2008). In North America, twenty-four iSchools have formed a caucus (`http://www.ischools.org/`) to advance a common agenda regarding the future of information studies. John Unsworth (2007) notes that digital humanities centers can establish new working relationships between humanities faculty and iSchool programs. iSchool faculty "are about half from other disciplines, and humanities computing is very much about information organization, ontologies, taxonomies, schema, preservation, interface design, and other issues that are studied and taught in [iSchool] programs. The [iSchool] connection also would help to activate the NEH/IMLS connection, as well as the NSF cyberinfrastructure connection."

While the move to develop digital humanities centers has demonstrated great successes, it has also meant the development of a number of unique but remote archives that are in danger of being lost. Universities in this digital age need to produce research and graduates that transcend traditional barriers and ways of working. The most influential origins of change wrought by

information technology might well emerge from the humanities and information sciences, which consider most deeply the heritage and future of the human experience. The progress of this interdisciplinary field, however, requires new models of collaboration among the information sciences and the humanities disciplines. In this context it is worth noting that all of the iSchools involved in the digital humanities internship program (described below) have well established archives programs, from which they recruit graduate students to send to the participating DH Centers.

This paper for DH2010 presents a new model partnership initiative to help build curricular and scholarly institutional infrastructures that leverage the existing and emerging capabilities of iSchools and digital humanities centers. With generous three-year support from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), three iSchools and three digital humanities centers are placing graduate student interns for extended summer work experiences in digital humanities centers. The collaborators include the iSchools at the University of Maryland, the University of Texas and the University of Michigan; and the DH Centers at the University of Maryland (Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities), the University of Nebraska (Center for Digital Research in the Humanities), and Michigan State University (MATRIX). The partners are also developing a collaborative research program that draws on complementary areas of expertise and interest in the digital humanities and information studies. The project is in its second year, preparing to place a second set of interns in summer 2010, with a total of 18 internships offered over the duration of the project.

The DH2010 paper contextualizes the model internship program within the broader academic framework of the mission and activities of iSchools, including the humanities-oriented profiles of students, a curriculum that meaningfully combines--in holistic fashion--computational, legal, informational, cultural, social, and managerial content; and faculty research that crosses the two cultures of the humanities and sciences.

1. Student Profiles

The DH2010 paper presents a demographic analysis of the students enrolled at the three collaborating iSchools, demonstrating the affinity (and enriching the alliance) between iSchools and DH Centers. A majority of students enter into iSchool programs with undergraduate and/or graduate degrees in the arts and humanities, frequently outnumbering their more science-oriented peers by statistically significant margins. At Maryland's iSchool, for example, approximately 62 percent of current masters students (or 212 out of 343) obtained undergraduate degrees in English, History, Art History, Religion, Classics, and Philosophy. At Texas, well over half of the students have solid humanities backgrounds in literature, the arts, and especially in history; and show an impressive understanding of the values, styles, and methods of humanities researchers. At Michigan the humanities subject expertise of fully one-third of entering graduate students is integrated into a broader framework that incorporates techniques for systematically creating, managing, preserving and otherwise enhancing the value of cultural heritage information.

2. iSchool Curriculum

The DH2010 paper exposes how iSchools have implemented curricula of relevance to digital humanities centers, particularly in the area of cyberinfrastructure. At Michigan, for example, a suite of technology/systems-oriented courses teach students how to build and evaluate dynamic complex websites and databases; undertake preservation reformatting of books, graphical, and audiovisual resources; produce EAD finding aids and other access tools; and create and maintain online communities. At Maryland, students are exposed to the legal issues in managing information and the corpus of documents – such as donor agreements – that codify them. Copyright, privacy, freedom of information, and other topics pertinent to archives and digital libraries are also covered. At Texas, a series of courses in digitization for preservation and access is paired with courses in digital libraries and a sequence developing digital archiving practices to provide students with a range of skills and knowledge pertinent to

preserving and providing access to humanities content.

3. Faculty Research

The DH2010 paper shows that iSchool faculty – an increasing number of whom have PhDs in arts and humanities disciplines – often conduct research with the potential to leverage and support the work of DH Centers. At Michigan, for example, Paul Resnick is pioneering work on recommender systems and the incentives that motivate eCommunities; Paul Conway is discovering how image quality issues in the large-scale digitization of cultural heritage resources impact innovative scholarship and use. At Texas, Gary Geisler is delving into improved interfaces for digital library presentations of materials from collections of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center; Patricia Galloway is investigating the use of tools from information retrieval and computational linguistics to frame digital corpora for the purposes of management and presentation. At Maryland, Derek Hansen and Kari Kraus recently received an NSF grant to understand and tailor alternate reality games for purposes of education and scholarly collaboration.

The DH2010 paper demonstrates how the first round of internships from the model program is establishing rich connections between iSchools and DH Centers. The model is sufficiently well articulated that it could further close working relationships between arts and humanities departments and DH Centers that wish to develop their own signature majors, minors, or concentrations in digital humanities. The paper concludes with a summary of successes, progress, and road-blocks in implementing the new internship model.

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