Digital Humanities as Public Humanities: Transformative Collaboration in Graduate Education

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The University of Florida (UF) has many longstanding Digital Humanities projects and programs.[1, 2, 3] Following years of activity with the campus-wide Digital Humanities Working Group, the creation of the Digital Humanities Graduate Certificate was supported by the ongoing partnerships across the George A. Smathers Libraries and other groups on campus.[4, 5] Creating the certificate led to important conversations about the role of libraries in developing collaborative opportunities for enhanced humanities graduate education and career preparation. Most recently, the libraries launched the Graduate Internship Program.[6] The Internship Program was specifically designed to support all involved—including graduate students, librarians, teaching faculty partners—and to enable and foster an environment for transformative collaboration. The internship program extends from and enhances the ongoing work to empower this kind of exchange by leveraging the Digital Humanities in the libraries.

UF’s activities in the Digital Humanities place the emphasis on Humanities as the Public Humanities. This is informed by UF’s mission as a public, land-grant institution and by exemplary work that engages the digital for Public Humanities. A focused exemplar of this sort of work can be found with Colored Conventions, [7] which is an online archive as well as a program of interdisciplinary collaborators engaging with many communities to build upon the hub. Like Colored Conventions, UF has engaged in programmatic work with the Digital and Public Humanities to enable many levels of collaboration including transformative collaboration, reduce obstacles to collaboration across the institution, and to remove barriers that prevent public engagement with scholarship and scholarly communities. This chapter covers specific collaborations to explore larger conceptual questions of the Digital Humanities as Public Humanities in relation to graduate education and library programs.

Libraries as Community Partners in Digital Humanities Program Building

UF’s program level activities in the Digital Humanities (DH) began in 2011 [8] with the formation of the Digital Humanities Working Group. This group was intentionally organized as a collaborative community to emphasize the Humanities as Public Humanities, with co-conveners instead of chairs or leaders. The strategy of having co-conveners rather than leaders reflects an orientation that values empowering the members. Organizing, rather than dictating the direction for the community allows a community of practice to develop. Harriet Green articulates these values in “Facilitating Communities of Practice in Digital Humanities: Librarian Collaborations for Research and Training in Text Encoding.” Green explains that in a community of practice, collective learning takes place in a domain through engagement with an enterprise, with skills and knowledge shared and learned within the community.[9] Similarly, seminal works on humanities practices also underscore the importance of community, including those individuals who become part of the community over time. The Report on the Commission on the Humanities explains:
“Even the most gifted individual, whether poet or physicist, will not realize his full potential or make his fullest contribution to his times unless his imagination has been kindled by the aspirations and accomplishments of those who have gone before him.”

The Report further explains that through the humanities, “we may come to know the excitement of ideas, the power of imagination, and the unsuspected energies of the creative spirit.” [10] In emphasizing the humanistic part of the work, the group addressed how the humanities could leverage technology to support the humanities in and for the digital age. The community affirmed that technology could not be a separate or exclusive domain. Realizing the full potential of the community required an inclusive and imaginative approach that located the driving focus in the humanities. Further, the group affirmed the need to capitalize on the potential of digital public humanities to engage communities beyond and outside of academia. This work is tied up with the work of transforming academia from within and examining what it means to do academic work.

The group discussions revealed that libraries - often described as the labs of the humanities - and librarians themselves are critical components for enabling necessary change. The discussions laid the foundation for radical and transformative collaboration. “Transformative” in this sense is best understood by examining its usage in Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for Higher Ground by Adam J. Banks. In it, Banks presents a taxonomy of access including material, functional, meaningful, critical, experiential, and transformative. Viewing access in this more complex and defined configuration provides the necessary framework for building into more advanced levels of access. As with transformative access, transformative collaboration demands meaningful engagement with relevance for lived experiences and opportunities for critical engagement. Transformative collaboration demands: “genuine inclusion in technologies and the networks of power that help determine what they become, but never merely for the sake of inclusion.”[11] The community intentionally embraced a taxonomy of access and collaboration to ensure diversity and inclusion. This was informed by research from Global Outlook :: Digital Humanities (GO::DH). [12] The GO::DH community includes researchers studying types of access involved in research communities, methods for engagement internationally and across differing resource levels, minimal computing approaches, multilingual approaches, and more. Recognizing the need for an inclusive approach that minimizes unnecessary obstacles and that presents scaffolding for building together across differences, the community adopted the taxonomy approach as a means for making explicit and addresses these needs. In working towards transformative collaboration, the community sought to transform the ways of working, work product, community, and community members. With overall goals for broad cultural change, specific goals for transformation included greater equity in the distribution of power and equitable crediting and compensation for work, including fostering opportunities for publishing with full recognition for authorship.

Despite the UF community’s desire to seek substantive changes, humanities scholarly training remains focused on individual authorship and printed texts. The group asserted a core concern for empowering collaborative work, often through engaging with librarians as trusted experts. While stressing the importance and affirming the value of individual work, the group determined to build support for collaborative practices in the humanities. In all of this, the group drew from the humanities for analytical, speculative, and imaginative practices. The UF community worked
to define Digital Humanities collaborative practices together, in a manner that remained open to redefinition and expansion. This is in keeping with humanities practices that recognize the importance of process as part of meaning-making. The UF community created the Digital Humanities Working Group as a community of practice organized to enable changes to support the Public Humanities. This follows from the group’s work to define DH in the local context. UF is one of the largest, most complex, and most comprehensive universities in the world, and its mission and vision are grounded in its public, land-grant status. The UF community defined and affirmed DH with emphasis on the humanities in informal meet-ups, annual conference and then unconference events, shared projects, and ongoing formal and informal conversations.

**Creating the DH Graduate Certificate**

To realize the larger goals for the Public Humanities, the UF community identified graduate education as an area of great potential for needed work. This was both strategic and opportunistic given reduced opportunities for academic employment alongside simultaneously smaller existing departments as faculty retired and were not replaced. With fewer faculty in existing departments, faculty are less able to provide for graduate education. Coupled with wide recognition of the need for training and support for seeking careers outside of academia, faculty faced more demands with fewer resources inside any given department. Graduate students also represent the next generation of scholars, teachers, and practitioners and changing academic practices must engage with graduate student education. To address these needs, the UF community again returned to the core vision with the Public Humanities. While concerned with improving graduate student career outcomes in the near-term, the community also affirmed the Digital Humanities as an opportunity for long-term change by engaging with the constant discussion of crisis in the humanities and working to change that problematic narrative. Humanities scholarly training results in many career outcomes. Empowering students to pursue various job outcomes, and sharing stories of these, helps to demonstrate the value and relevance of the humanities. In all discussions, the community affirmed the need for transforming humanities graduate education to bring together the full community of practice, so that students would learn and undertake collaborative ways of working as part of their research and teaching.

Discussions focused on librarians as essential for transformative collaboration because librarians are uniquely positioned on campus as “cultural travelers” who:

> “are able to travel throughout the different campus cultures […] act as bridge builders and translators between different groups. Cultural travelers have tremendous influence and insight and have deep awareness of what is occurring on campus.” [13]

Librarians are also called “to be innovative and to develop their capabilities to operate in a new way with academic partners and clients.”[14] UF Librarians are actively engaged in teaching classes and conducting research, and are recognized as expert collaborators. Teaching and library faculty, as part of the community of practice, identified an opportunity to reshape graduate education as part of their work of transforming academic practice in the humanities.

The UF community identified opportunities for creating a Digital Humanities Graduate Certificate and internship programs. The Digital Humanities Graduate Certificate was created by
faculty from multiple different colleges and departments. The faculty came together to define the certificate in terms of the courses, goals, and operations with governance. This is UF’s first fully interdisciplinary certificate, in that it is not situated in any single department or college. Instead, the certificate is governed by a board of faculty members from multiple departments and colleges, including a faculty member from the libraries. The efforts to create the certificate, which included many administrative discussions and concerns incumbent with its “first-of-kind” nature [15], brought teaching and library faculty together to focus on problems and opportunities with graduate education. The certificate requires three courses. Importantly, two are drawn from existing courses, where the board has approved the courses, with students required to take a depth and a breadth course. The certificate adds the new Digital Humanities Studio, which is required to be co-taught by a teaching and library faculty member. The course and the board were intentionally designed to model collaborative practices, ensure inclusion of multiple perspectives and fields, and foster an environment for further collaboration. In establishing the Digital Humanities Graduate Certificate, the UF community again emphasized the humanities in terms of publicly engaged work:

“the digital humanities makes creative use of digital technologies to advance the study of both inherited experience and intellectual innovation. We emphasize how the humanities provide a crucial context for understanding the past, present, and future of human experience while recognizing the digital technologies and cultures that our students encounter in their research, teaching, and professional lives.” [4]

The Graduate Certificate performed as designed for fostering collaboration, leading to a full program plan written as a grant proposal, “Publicly Engaging and Employing Scholars in the Humanities.” [16]

While the grant was not ultimately funded, the work in developing the grant led to an intentional plan for enabling transformative collaboration through processes with graduate education. The UF community specifically identified the need for graduate student internships that were designed for students to gain experience while also furthering the UF community of practice in the public humanities. This design meant that a particularly high value was placed on graduate students working as interns in libraries. Interest in the internships from the libraries included supporting the strategic direction for transformative collaboration, recognizing graduate student skills and expertise, and recognizing the changing nature of academic library work and employment. Indeed, several faculty members in the libraries are involved with the Association of Research Libraries Position Description Bank [17], which collects position descriptions for immediate local use and for tracking the evolution of academic library work over time, including position requirements and needs in relation to humanities graduate education. In addition to studying changes after they occur as expressed in position descriptions, humanities graduate student interns provide insight to inform needed and expected changes to academic library positions and academic organizational structures more broadly. Teaching faculty supported placing graduate students in library internships because of the acknowledged value of collaborating with the libraries, a value demonstrated by the certificate, overall DH and public humanities activities, and expanded and improved graduate student job outcomes when students have collaborative experience.
The libraries and teaching units were in agreement on the need for and value of graduate internships with the recognition of the opportunity for shared benefit for teaching departments, graduate students, and libraries in the digital age. Following this consensus, the next step of development focused on creating a program for internships, differentiating itself from prior opportunistic project-based internships, in the form of funded and unfunded internships. The internship program was developed with goals, operations, ongoing development, and funding, recognizing the need for paid internships [18]:

“The Smathers Graduate Student Internship Program provides semester-based graduate student internships in the George A. Smathers Libraries in collaboration with academic units. The Smathers Graduate Student Internship Program experience will complement the graduate student’s academic career and provide for their professional development. […] Successful proposals are competitively selected in the fall and spring, and are funded by the Libraries to occur in the following semester(s). These internships will benefit the Libraries and foster transformative collaboration across campus. Proposals require collaboration with at least one faculty member or exempt-level employee in the Libraries, who will serve as the Internship Director, and one faculty member partner from outside of the Libraries. The Program provides a supportive environment for those who wish to gain experience conceptualizing, writing, and administering internship projects.” [6]

The program established a framework for library and teaching faculty partners to work together to support graduate student interns. The program is designed to ensure the internships will benefit the libraries, foster collaboration across campus, and generate work within the public humanities. Individual internship proposals are assessed on factors reflecting outcomes in: benefits to the graduate student for their academic career and professional development; benefits to the libraries, the partnering academic unit, and the campus, and the potential for transformative collaboration; and, benefits to the Internship Director’s professional experience, accomplishments, and/or scholarship.

In the first year of operations, the program awarded a total of 16 semesters of paid internship work. Despite our core humanist values that strive to support the emotional and lived conditions of workers, many problems arose. The Digital Humanities has intensified existing issues and revealed new problems, such as lack of attribution, credit, and payment for work.[19] Framing digital tools and methods through the humanities and Public Humanities makes explicit the need and opportunity to discuss concerns on labor, compensation, and working conditions, including these concerns with collaborative work. Short case studies of the experiences of the interns inform and shape perceptions of intellectual labor, and programmatic methods for leveraging the Digital Humanities for enabling collaboration.

**Internship Case Study: Publishing DH Work**

The DH & Publishing Internship began by focusing on the LibraryPress@UF and on preparing to support the year of activities with the Digital Humanities Working Group. The core goals of the internship centered on sustaining local DH communities at UF, as well as fostering interdisciplinary conversations with other Florida academic institutions. In doing so, the goal was to create an environment of networked, collaborative research and pedagogical practices. The
DH Intern started in April 2016 by working with the newly established LibraryPress@UF, an imprint of the University of Florida Press. The first project focused on UF named buildings and institutional history. For this, the intern researched the UF Digital Collections and archives regarding various architectural stipulations and historical backgrounds of UF historical buildings. Subsequently, the intern worked as an acquisitions editor with LibraryPress@UF. In this capacity, the intern researched the feasibility and the processes to commission an academic book series based on scholarship arising out of the UF Baldwin Library of Historical Children’s Literature, and children’s special collections more generally. The goal was to develop a collaborative “enhanced book” project (with digital components), based on the Baldwin. The peer-reviewed edited collection, *B is for Baldwin: An Alphabet Journey through the Baldwin Library*, is currently under contract with LibraryPress@UF and slated for publication in late 2017. Other projects involve team-based creation of an exhibit to promote the Mellon-funded grant, *Books About Florida and the Caribbean: From the University Press of Florida to the World*. This exhibit was developed to serve as a model for future collaborative exhibits with the libraries and the Press and for further exhibits in collaboration with graduate students.

The DH intern co-convened the Digital Humanities Working Group, organizing informal meet-ups on DH scholarship, which included presentations on Historical GIS, Public History and Digital Archives, and Digitizing of Public Scholarship, by scholars at UF and beyond. Additionally, the intern co-chaired the organizing committee for THATCamp Gainesville 2017, a Humanities and Technology “unconference” where participants collaboratively presented on and shared their DH research and teaching interests. In keeping with the goal to form connections beyond the libraries and support DH research initiatives at other institutions, the intern attended DH showcases and symposia at the University of North Florida and Florida State University. The intern promoted academic cross-pollinations and created opportunities for outreach, networking, and collaboration. The intern attended grant-writing workshops and library trainings, including on metadata and institutional repositories, and applied for grants for her own professional development. She was awarded the 2016-2018 HASTAC Scholars Grant and Taraknath Das fellowship at the South Asia Institute at Columbia [20, 21]. As a member of the UF Press Diversity Research Group, the intern also learned more about working in libraries, in presses, and institutional cultures more broadly. The intern gained valuable insight into best practices for workplace interactions in order to foster supportive and inclusive working environments.

**Internship Case Study: Sustaining DH Work**

The Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC) is an established and flourishing international open access digital library and community.[21] This enabled the interns to begin their work immediately situated within conceptual issues and questions of Digital Humanities as Public Humanities, directly engaging with graduate education and library programs. dLOC’s success began as centered on and has fostered questions on how the digital library resources, infrastructure, and community can be expanded into new collaborations with scholars.[23] dLOC’s community has strong shared governance and engagement with the community of scholars. The full community enthusiastically supported engagement with graduate students for library collaboration.
Both of the dLOC interns worked on multiple projects situated within the digital and public humanities. An ongoing project for one intern was the transformation of a student-created site to a more comprehensive document that could then be added to dLOC. Undergraduates created the original site which was an extensive annotation of the book *The Swinging Bridge* by Rambai Espinet.[24] Their annotations included historical and cultural context, mapping locations, and background on the author. The intern edited the content and reorganized the material so that it was easier to navigate. A challenge to editing the site was the interpretation of student work to determine their argument. This had to be done without benefit of interaction with the original students who created the site, since they were no longer involved in the project. As a collaborative project, this was an interesting process because it meant working to keep the voice of the original authors while adding to the material to make it more useful for the dLOC community.

Alongside this ongoing work, another significant project was a survey of various digital archives and collaborative sites, focusing on digital pedagogy. The goal for this project was to determine how other sites organized, presented, and disseminated their material and which of those practices could be adopted for dLOC. In order to compile an initial list of sites to investigate, the intern posed questions on Facebook and received suggestions. Using these recommendations as a starting point for further investigation, the intern was able to develop criteria to review such sites, including evaluating the aesthetics of each site, the organization of their material, and the accessibility of content. Several commonalities among the best sites quickly surfaced. These sites were usually the ones with many images and downloadable material. The sites included a space for visitors to engage in the material through blogs, guidelines, and teaching material. Also, the sites linked to other sites and resources. Working on these two projects helped inform searches for additional resources and the identification of ways in which dLOC can be improved. The projects also provided a lesson on collaborative work. Communication is an essential part of collaboration but sometimes that means discarding projects or ideas that no longer seem to work for the group goal, or are not possible to accomplish at the time. This was often the case with the types of potentially beneficial improvements for dLOC which but were not financially and logistically feasible. Collaborative work, then, is always an exercise in editing – making ideas clearer, tightening the scope, moving things around to see what works better, what flows more easily.

**Internship Case Study: Translating DH Work**

The second dLOC intern worked on several projects, including collaborating with the other intern to survey digital archive and digital scholarship sites focused on Caribbean Studies. In surveying these sites, the intern investigated how scholars used digital tools to both challenge colonial histories of the Caribbean and reveal decolonial pasts. For example, scholars utilized digital mapping software to create interactive maps that narrativized slave revolts against colonial powers. Other scholars digitized early Caribbean slave narratives to demonstrate the Black, Creole, enslaved and/or colonized people’s writings and their significance to Caribbean literary history as opposed to privileging colonial authors. In surveying these sites, the intern observed that translations by scholars were integral to Caribbean Studies digital humanities projects. Whether it was the literal translation of a text from Haitian Creole to English or “translating” military and newspapers accounts from the archive into an interactive map, scholars
who produce work at the intersection of the digital humanities and Caribbean Studies have to have multiple levels of literacy—digital, linguistic, etc.—to communicate with various publics in their work. Translation is an apt metaphor for collaboration in this internship as working across interdisciplinary backgrounds and scholarly expertise required reformulating and re-presenting one’s findings to various people in different contexts. For example, both interns’ work on digital pedagogy and Caribbean digital humanities projects were re-presented and translated into a scholarly presentation at the West Indian Literature conference and into individual, public presentations for an audience of library and university staff, faculty and graduate students. The two internships thus complemented each other with one focusing on digital pedagogy and the other on digital and Caribbean Studies to then be taken together for informing next steps for dLOC, and to support collaboration with the interns.

The other projects by this intern included leveraging and utilizing the data created and analyzed from the survey to develop and plan a symposium on Digital Humanities and Caribbean Studies. The symposium will interrogate how the political economy of the Caribbean and the United States—and the tensions therein—both create and frustrate opportunities for transnational digital humanities work. The symposium will feature scholars based in the United States and the Caribbean to discuss how they incorporate digital humanities into their research as well as their pedagogy. The symposium will be another opportunity for interdisciplinary thinking, collaboration and research. The intern proposed planning the event and writing a grant to the team, and led the development and submission of the full grant proposal [25] which was awarded.

Both of the dLOC interns utilized Zotero to create a shared group library for the annotated listing from the survey of digital pedagogy and Caribbean Studies Digital Humanities sites.[26] Both dLOC interns also actively engaged in the editing and curation of materials from the Panama Silver, Asian Gold: Migration, Money, and the Making of the Modern Caribbean Distributed Online Collaborative Course (DOCC, a feminist rethinking of the MOOC).[27]

**Conclusion**

In focusing on the community of practice and community organizing, UF has consistently framed the Digital Humanities as the Public Humanities. The UF community pursued specific collaborations that leveraged the opportunity with the Digital Humanities—including the DH Graduate Certificate and Graduate Internship Program—as part of the work to foster transformative collaboration in academia for broader impacts within and beyond academia. In the larger mission-oriented work and the specific programmatic activities, librarians are essential partners who bring expertise in collaborative practices and expanded ways of working with communities.

Next stage activities for the Internship Program will continue to inform questions of Digital Humanities as Public Humanities in terms of engagement for graduate education and library programs. As shown in the preceding case studies, the interns are active participants and leaders in shaping the internship program. They often directed their own work and conceptualized, created, and led new initiatives as part of their internships. This work is undertaken as a collaborative community of practice and directly supports the Digital Humanities as Public
Interns shared valuable insights on the nature of collaborative work, and what it means to develop collaborative work practices. The collaborative nature of the work of the internship program informs how libraries and teaching departments can best come together to engage for graduate education. The internship program continues to evolve. Now, interns are invited to attend search committee meetings to observe the recruitment and selection processes for academic librarian positions. The data gathered during the first year is being reviewed to inform improvements. Next steps include adding a structured networking session to better connect the interns, librarians, and teaching faculty to best support the internship program in enabling transformational collaboration for libraries and graduate education.

As the internship program continues to grow and evolve, the emphasis on the larger goals for utilizing the Digital Humanities as the Public Humanities for transformative collaboration continue. With librarians as essential partners in the work of transformative collaboration within academia, librarians are also critical collaborators for the work of Public Humanities and for shifting the conversation in the humanities from one of crisis to one of opportunity, abundance, and inclusion.

Reference List


