

The Value of Embedding Digital Humanities in the Undergraduate Curriculum

This paper presents theoretical and practical considerations germane to incorporating digital humanities into classroom pedagogy. Classics as a discipline has been at the forefront of digital humanities since their early days in the early 70's. Innovative tools such as the Ibycus system, the *Database of Classical Bibliography*, the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* and the Perseus Project transformed how classicists conducted research (Crane 2004). Most of these early projects, however, mainly served faculty and graduate students rather than undergraduates and high school students. And users were primarily consumers rather than co-creators. In the last decade, the landscape has begun to change; a new generation of “digital natives” who grew up with social media, gaming, and the explosion of apps has embraced opportunities that invite a more active and collaborative role, be it participating in larger projects involving crowd sourcing or creating and posting their own projects online. This paper presents a selection of digital humanities (DH) projects by undergraduates. It foregrounds the learning outcomes particular to them and argues that their value is recognized by employers, grant foundations, and tenure and promotion committees.

The DH projects presented range from those requiring a low threshold of technical expertise (e.g., co-authoring Wikipedia articles) to more technically complex projects (e.g., participating in the Homer Multitext Project) in which students acquire new skills such as XML editing. They also vary in scope from individual projects to group projects by students in a single course to multi-institutional projects. The paper foregrounds the learning outcomes of these projects, and especially how these differ from those of “traditional” classroom assignments. DH projects can teach transferable skills highly prized in a variety of professions. These include technical skills valuable to companies and organizations as they seek to enhance their visibility through digital content and social media. Even more valuable, however, are the cognitive and social skills that students gain. DH projects develop cognitive

skills such as critical thinking and problem solving as students respond to the challenges of conceptualizing, designing, testing, and implementing their projects. Students also develop social skills through the collaborative modus operandi found in most DH projects. The ability to work effectively as a team is highly prized by employers. While collaborative research is the norm in scientific disciplines, in the humanities research has traditionally been pursued individually (Anderson and Davis 2012). DH projects also serve students well by providing a documented record of these liberal arts skills that can be incorporated into portfolios and interactive online resumes.

Digital humanities is a rapidly growing area of interest, and the funding available for DH initiatives is also growing. For example, in 2006 the National Endowment of Humanities created an Office of Digital Humanities, and offers Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants and Digital Humanities Implementation Grants. Although NEH funding is primarily directed towards innovative, high-level projects, few of which actively involve undergraduates, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation funds many projects at both research universities and liberal arts colleges relating to the digital humanities, providing grants of up to \$2 million. The Mellon Foundation's interest in the public humanities dovetails with the potential of DH projects to make the humanities visible and accessible to the public at large and to provide student scholarship with an audience beyond the instructor. The paper draws on the presenter's experience from participating in a Mellon-funded grant proposal to offer courses for college sophomores with a DH focus "providing students with collaborative hands-on experiences with cultural materials" in order to "develop the critical thinking, analytical, and communications skills that surveys conducted by the AAC&U and a study by Project Information Literacy suggest employers seek," (quoted from grant proposal). Instructors who embed DH projects in their courses on a more modest scale can also secure financial support from internal funding sources and recognition from tenure and promotion committees.

Works Cited

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