

Managing Scope and Scale: Applying the Incubator Model to Digital Scholarship

Introductory notes, Alix Keener

Welcome and introductions

- Short presentations--making time for Q+A
- Will give a brief intro, and then each of these three teams will go over their incubators.
 - They will each briefly discuss the context their incubator operates within, highlights of their particular model, and lessons learned/next steps
- Then I will have some responses, initial questions on:
 - Commonalities/themes across the three models, how they each have adapted to their contexts in different ways

This collaborative panel started out as a DH Slack conversation and grew from there, as we realized that several of us were in different stages of planning, implementing, and running incubators out of the library (or in my case, proposing and hoping!).

Digital scholarship incubators model functional ways for libraries and other units to manage “scale” and provide a unique research experience while imagining and developing new research projects and processes. By adapting the mentor model from tech incubators, digital scholarship incubators typically assemble a team of experts (researchers, librarians, and/or administrators) to work with an individual or project team. Incubators provide an environment where researchers engage with digital scholarship experts in the library in order to develop prototypes and workflows.

There is a shared expectation that the collaboration will result in demonstrable outcomes—for both researchers and incubator leaders—increased capacities, a larger base of community knowledge and support, and participants' commitment to touting the benefits of their experience in support of others' work.

This panel features librarians and digital humanists at various stages of incubator implementation at their own institutions. Florida State University launched [PEN and Inc. \(Project Enhancement Network and Incubator\)](#) in Fall 2016. UCLA Libraries piloted its [Digital Research StartUP Partnership](#) program in Summer 2015 and just finished the second iteration of its incubator. The University Libraries at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has been running its [Digital Scholarship Incubator](#) since 2014.

Moderator Responses

(From notes taken during presentation as well)

- When we first started chatting about incubators and libraries, we talked about the “fellowship” vs. “meeting place” model, which got at questions about audience of the incubator (grad students, faculty) and physical space.
- UCLA: train the trainer approach is a great idea, both for sustainability and scaling the incubator up by feeding back in expertise that is developed. Many are trying to implement these kinds of library trainings; having it embedded in the incubator is very smart
 - FSU as well--encouraging participants to become project mentors
- Structuring: all three are time-bound and cohort-based.
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- The models range in the amount of direct instruction vs. creating space for fostering collaboration and innovation--FSU more of a course-based approach, while UCLA and UNL have expertise available when needed
- At Michigan, I wrote a proposal for an incubator that would serve as an option for graduate students pursuing a digital studies certificate to use as their 3-credit practicum requirement.
 - At FSU, I'm curious how the incubator feeds into/out of the new DH MA
- Timing seems to be a theme--both UCLA and UNL do this in the summer. **FSU?** Can you speak to your thought process in where in the academic calendar these incubators were inserted?

Questions for Panel

On slide:

1. Why was your particular model chosen?
2. How did you select projects to incubate? What exactly is being incubated?
3. How are your incubators funded and staffed?

Others:

1. How are your incubators different from a library fellowship or a digital scholarship lab?
2. How do you set the tone of your program? What is the incubator culture like, and how are you fostering exploration and creativity?
3. What has the reception been like, both internally in the library, and across campus?
4. How did you get buy-in, both from your administration, and to solicit participants and applications?

Questions to get Conversation Started

1. How many of you are planning an incubator-of-sorts?
2. Would any of these models resonate at your institution? Why or why not?