

NOTE: The proposal below was submitted in October 2013 for a pilot year of funding for the Digital Scholarship Incubator at UNL. The pilot was funded at \$5,000. The major difference between this proposal and the actual pilot had to do with space: neither existing physical space nor the budget allowed for the full development of the plan outlined here. For further information on how this proposed plan and budget differ from what happened in practice, please contact Liz Lorang (liz.lorang@unl.edu).

Innovation/R&D Funds Proposal

Digital Humanities Incubator

Purpose

As UNL continues to build its reputation as an international leader in digital humanities (DH), to recruit world-class DH faculty, and to lead major research projects in the field, it must also invest in student success in digital humanities beyond the classroom. Presently, students pursuing digital humanities research and scholarship at UNL must be much more entrepreneurial than their faculty advisers, who have significantly more resources at their disposal, whether professional networks, financial resources, or computing resources. Because students have few resources at hand for their digital scholarship, they may choose not to pursue an important research question simply because they cannot afford to undertake a project or lack knowledge to get it off the ground. This situation is dire because other institutions—including those with reputations less distinguished than UNL's—are graduating students who have created intellectually rigorous and technologically advanced projects, not only as a student member of a research team but as the lead investigator. To address this resource gap and to promote the development of student-led digital humanities research and scholarship at UNL, I propose the Digital Humanities Incubator for consideration for UNL Libraries' Innovation/R&D Funds. This project is an appropriate use of Innovation/R&D Funds because it can be run as a pilot project, it directly benefits our student patrons, and such a new model of support for student digital scholarship carries with it some risk. In addition, the Incubator aligns with the strategic focus statements of the UNL Libraries, including brokering access to knowledge resources; fostering a transformative environment for scholarship; creating new scholarly resources for research; and developing inspiring and functional spaces to encourage creativity, collaboration, and knowledge.

The Digital Humanities Incubator is modeled on the example of small business incubators, such as that run by Southeast Community College.¹ The Incubator would provide professionalizing opportunities for student researchers; research consultations; coaching and support; access to resources, including hardware, software, people, and materials; and a community environment. Students would apply to the Incubator program. An application process will provide the students with an award line for their resumes and CVs as well as help the Incubator develop a cohort. Such an application process is in keeping with similar programs at other universities, such as the Praxis Program at the University of Virginia Libraries.

Environmental Scan

The Maryland Institute for Technology (MITH) in the Humanities and the University of Maryland Libraries currently sponsor a digital humanities incubator for library faculty, staff, and students. The MITH Incubator is a series of workshops that lead to the submission of an

¹ <https://www.southeast.edu/Entrepreneurship/BusinessIncubationAndCoaching/>

application for internal or external funding. Similarly, the Carolina Digital Humanities Initiative sponsored a Spatial Humanities Incubator in the fall of 2012, which was also a series of workshops intended to help participants conceptualize and develop projects. Other incubator models also exist: the Philadelphia area digital humanities group (Philly Digital Humanities), for example, sponsored an event it titled an incubator; participants pitched ideas, and select projects were connected with volunteers to help see the projects through to the proof-of-concept stage. By focusing its incubator initiative on student research, UNL Libraries could make a significant intervention in the development of digital humanities at UNL and participate in emerging conversations about new structures necessary for the support of digital humanities scholarship. In addition, the Incubator would further position the Libraries as one of UNL's most important assets for digital humanities scholarship at UNL, and the Libraries' faculty and staff as collaborators and co-creators of this innovative research.

Resources

Space

For a pilot year, the Digital Humanities Incubator will require space in Love Library that can comfortably seat 6-8 people at a time, and the space should be available from early morning until late evening to accommodate a variety of student schedules. The space would need to be available to the Incubator students as a group and also individually, so that the space can be used for workshops, presentations, project consultations and coaching, as well as student research time.

People

Liz Lorang will direct the Incubator. In addition to coordinating programming for the students, she will hold office hours in the Incubator as part of her work to support student digital scholarship in UNL Libraries. There would be no other regular personnel commitments for the Incubator, although Liz would occasionally ask CDRH and other library faculty and staff to make presentations to the students.

Furniture and Equipment

The space should be inviting to students and facilitate many forms of collaboration, including engaged discussion over coffee and serious research and writing (whether of code or prose). The space should therefore include both some pieces of comfortable furniture as well as movable tables and chairs. Specific student needs would dictate the computer hardware and software portion of the budget. A television or projector and screen are desired but may not fit with the budget.

Student Project Funds

Student project funds would be competitive funds for which students could apply based on project need. Project funds could be used for domain and web hosting, submitting data to the data repository, code repository subscriptions, other services, and marketing materials, among

other potential project costs. These are expenses faculty researchers are likely to have covered through university research funds or the affiliation with a research center, or they have a greater ability to individually pay for their services.

Student Bursaries

Bursaries would support student travel to professional conferences and training opportunities, including the the Digital Humanities Summer Institute, the Humanities Intensive Learning + Teaching, the annual conference of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations, and Rare Book School at the University of Virginia.

Draft Budgets

\$10,000 Budget			\$5,000 Budget	
Furniture and supplies	\$2,000		Furniture and supplies	\$1,000
Hardware and software	\$3,500		Hardware and software	\$2,500
Student project funds	\$2,000		Student project funds	\$1,500
Student bursaries	\$2,500			
	\$10,000			\$5,000