Digital Humanities at Boston College

TEI, Gephi, Wordle, Zotero. At first glance, these terms can look a bit like alphabet soup. However, to a digital humanist, these applications are as common as opening a book. With technology becoming more prevalent, scholars are more likely to incorporate technology into their teaching. Digital Humanities combines scholarly humanities research with technology. It focuses on both digitized and born digital materials combining materials from the traditional humanities disciplines with technologically based tools.

In many ways, humanities research already uses technology. Whether you are analyzing the analog or digital version of a book, chances are you are using a computer to aid in your research. Computers have taken the place of the card catalogue and in many cases, the pen and paper. However, Digital humanities takes computing in the Humanities to the next level by making computing part of the research process. Researchers are discovering new ways to manipulate and analyze data discover information that was previously unattainable. The library and IDeS staff are noticing an increasing number of requests from professors looking to introduce their students to new ways of analyzing and interacting with various scholarly materials. As a result, the Boston College Library is ramping up their digital efforts to further assist faculty and students with new ways of researching and assessing material.

Digital humanities provides opportunities for increased collaboration among scholars, librarians, technology, and instructional design staff. The Library will play a leading role in providing support through the integration of digital resources, methodologies, technologies, and analytical tools with traditional resources in a multi-edge approach to the humanities. Serving as a connector between groups, the library has a proven track record of organizing and connecting information sources and will be able to successfully merge research materials with cutting edge technology.

Ideas and resources are already being exchanged among library staff ensuring that we will be able to meet the needs of the Boston College Community in the realm of Digital Humanities. These are:

1. Creation of the Digital Humanities Interest Group [DHIG]: Currently focusing on educating library staff, this group exists to exchange ideas and bet kept abreast of new technologies and opportunities. In the fall of 2012, faculty and non-library will be invited to join the group enabling researchers to find support among a group of like-minded scholars.

2. By becoming more involved with the Digital Humanities, the Library will be able to participate and support cross-departmental digital projects. We will be able to help manage projects and data and to assess the needs of the faculty. It is widely understood that with the boom of the internet, researchers are dealing with a large amount of data that can sometimes be overwhelming. The library has the expertise in both managing and discovering content that may not be widely available. Furthermore, the library can point researchers to materials available at BC that may have been overlooked.

3. The Library will be able to facilitate scholars as they explore new ways of using technology. A Digital Humanities Libguide is currently being created and will be available publicly shortly. In the interim, librarians are attending training sessions, conferences, and are becoming well versed in the technologies that are currently available. More importantly, by taking an active role, the libraries will be able to stay ahead of the technology curve and be able to recognize emerging trends and technologies in the field of DH. Examples include the use of the TEI (Textual Encoding Initiative) in the classroom per the direction of Professor Laurie Shepard. The library was able to provide assistance with the TEI, holding office hours, working with students and Professor Shepard and providing access to Oxygen XML editing software.

Technology is dynamic. In order to succeed in DH, one must be open-minded, experimental, and willing to take a chance with a burgeoning project or specific program. The Libraries are available to foster relationships, provide guidance, and most importantly, allow for experimentation within the field of Digital Humanities.

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