Where Belonging Meets Innovation:
Building a Public Digital Humanities Center in a Joint-Use Library

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Introduction

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library (King Library) at San José State University (SJSU) is one of the few joint-use university and public libraries in the United States. Through its partnership with the City of San José's Public Library (SJPL), King Library serves over 30,000 SJSU students and faculty as well as more than a million residents in San José, California, sharing spaces, programming, services and collections. This unique model fosters collaboration and public engagement beyond what is typically possible in stand-alone academic libraries.[1] By supporting both academic scholarship and public access to knowledge, King Library is well positioned to house a Digital Humanities (DH) Center with a mission that integrates digital humanities research and pedagogy with community-driven scholarship and digital literacy.

Rationale for a Digital Humanities Center

The field of digital humanities (DH) integrates computational tools and digital methodologies with traditional humanities scholarship, transforming research and expanding interdisciplinary collaboration. Universities across the country establish DH centers to provide faculty and students with access to advanced tools such as data visualization platforms, textual analysis software, and digital archiving resources. Access to these tools is critical to advancing digital scholarship projects.

Recent scholarship also emphasizes the importance of prioritizing community and capacity-building over technology investments for the success of DH and DH centers. Fenlon's multimodal studies on sustainability practices in DH highlight that collections created with a focus on community service and maintained by stewards who actively engage with user communities—such as libraries—tend to exhibit greater relevance and longevity.[2] Cummings, Roh,

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and Calloway further demonstrate through their analysis that building capacity through people, expertise, and partnerships fosters more sustainable and meaningful engagement than merely equipping spaces with advanced technology.[3] Case studies across the digital humanities field consistently underscore the significance of co-creation,[4] community involvement,[5] and conceptualizing DH centers as "interdisciplinary laboratories"[6] as central to their future success. Pamela Lach, Director of the Digital Humanities Center at San Diego State University Library, persuasively argues in her chapter "Centering Our Values: A Framework for Digital Humanities in the Library" that by focusing on values such as human connection, co-learning, and community care, the DH Center at San Diego State has effectively navigated critical challenges and resource scarcity.[7] Interdisciplinary collaboration, community engagement, and user-centeredness are drivers of a thriving DH center.

Local communities increasingly contribute to DH centers and initiatives, but much untapped potential remains for DH work to be truly community-driven and participatory. By situating a DH Center within King Library's joint-use structure, SJSU seeks to bridge the gap between academic research and public scholarship, fostering collaboration among faculty, students, community scholars and artists, local heritage organizations, and technology practitioners. Scholars emphasize that DH initiatives should move beyond viewing communities as research subjects and instead co-create projects with them, ensuring that local voices play an active role in decision-making around access, preservation, and content creation.[8] Open and participatory research models—such as crowdsourced archives, oral history projects, and interactive digital exhibits—offer a framework for such engagement, allowing communities to contribute knowledge and shape research outcomes in meaningful ways. As an established shared space between community and researchers, King Library already facilitates similarly collaborative activities. This includes university-community projects in the College of Humanities and Arts' John Steinbeck Center and San Jose Public Library's local history-focused California Room, both located in King Library.

Located in Silicon Valley, the DH Center can also serve as a bridge between humanistic research, the technology sector, and the broader community. By leveraging both the technological innovation of the region and the expertise housed within the university and public library system, the center facilitates digital storytelling, ethical discussions, and responsible technology development. Additionally, joint digitization and exhibition efforts expand access to historical collections and cultural archives, reinforcing the importance of community participation in preservation initiatives.[9] Research further suggests that DH centers play a critical role in expanding institutional research capacity, supporting complex digital scholarship, and fostering interdisciplinary engagement.[10] King Library's DH Center provides opportunities for students and faculty to engage with others across disciplines, broadening access to digital scholarship and humanistic methodologies. Helping each scholar to define digital humanities for themselves within a "broad umbrella" of possibilities is one of the Center's core values.[11]

Beyond academia, DH centers significantly contribute to public scholarship by democratizing knowledge production. Through their support of open access tools, digital archives, and participatory research opportunities, such centers enable collaborative storytelling, community history projects, and interactive data visualizations. By putting the university into partnership with the public library, we hope to ensure that digital projects remain accessible, dynamic, and responsive to community needs long after their life as a research project ends, a persistent issue in digital humanities.[12]

Establishing the Partnerships: University Library, Public Library, Humanities & Arts

Within the DH Center, each partnering organization plays an important role. The project purposefully builds on the strengths of each partner and expands opportunities and activities beyond what any of the organizations could achieve independently.

University Library's Role

The SJSU Library serves as a hub for research and digital scholarship on campus. It provides essential infrastructure, including an institutional repository and digital collections that support open-access scholarship, data visualization, and hosting platforms for research and digital projects. Special collections and archival digitization projects are already integrated with DH methodologies. The DH Center builds on these existing strengths by creating a dedicated space for digital research, experimentation, and community engagement.

Public Library's Role

The San José Public Library (SJPL) emphasizes public programming, accessibility, and lifelong learning. The DH Center will facilitate community participation in DH projects such as oral history collections, digital mapping, and citizen science initiatives. Initial plans include workshops and training in data literacy, digital storytelling, and historical research for non-academic users while expanding access to research tools for independent scholars, genealogists, and history enthusiasts. The integration of digital humanities into public programming can facilitate greater community participation in cultural and historical research while strengthening the library's role in supporting community-based knowledge production. The public library has significant expertise in engaging diverse communities in conversation around service and space needs and expectations, experience that was crucial when planning the Community Conversations discussed later in this paper.

College of Humanities & Arts' Role

The College of Humanities & Arts (H&A) contributes through curriculum development, faculty research, student engagement, programming and events. H&A faculty provide expertise in incorporating DH methodologies into research efforts and pedagogy across projects and courses. Existing humanities centers such as the Steinbeck Center, Beethoven Center, and Center for Literary Arts serve as foundational institutions for developing DH initiatives. H&A initiatives exploring the ethical and societal impacts of technology align closely with the DH Center's mission and inform programming themes. The College has been instrumental in facilitating conversations and outreach efforts with the SJSU campus community around the DH Center and in our current efforts to develop inclusive mission and value statements for the Center.

Proposing and Funding King Library's Digital Humanities Center

While the primary focus of the DH Center's development is on fostering a community-centered approach, establishing the Center necessitates a substantial infrastructure investment to ensure a fully functional and accessible space. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Digital Humanities Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge Grant was identified as a strategic funding opportunity for the DH Center. This grant "supports purchase, design, construction, restoration, or renovation of buildings or sites of national, historical, architectural, or cultural significance and facilities that house humanities collections or are used for humanities activities."[13] The proposal was formally submitted with the Dean of the College of Humanities and the Arts and Associate Dean of the University Library serving as co-primary investigators. SJPL's City Librarian provided a letter of support affirming the public library's commitment to partnering in the development of the DH Center and its subsequent programming.

As a challenge grant, this funding mechanism provided a 1:1 federal match for privately fundraised dollars over a period of up to five years. For this project, we applied for $375,000 in federal funding, bringing the total project estimate to $750,000 with the required match. The application underwent an initial unsuccessful review

in 2019, followed by a successful resubmission in 2020. A key revision in the second submission involved prioritizing the Center's community engagement mission over a strictly technological or research-based focus.

Although challenge grants present a demanding fundraising model, they serve as powerful incentives for private philanthropy and institutional investment by demonstrating federal endorsement. The required matching funds can enhance donor confidence, inspiring initial contributions or larger philanthropic commitments. However, the annual matching requirements necessitate a sustained and strategic fundraising effort. SJSU's established development office provides King Library with a dedicated director of development and fundraising platforms.

To cultivate campus-wide support and engage potential donors, the College of Humanities and the Arts and King Library developed a digital portal showcasing the breadth and impact of DH initiatives at SJSU and in collaboration with the broader community. A comprehensive database of ongoing projects was created, populated by campus and community researchers and practitioners who were invited to contribute and describe their work. Currently, the database includes over 200 projects and continues to expand, serving as a valuable entry point into DH research and pedagogy at SJSU. The database remains publicly accessible at https://library.sjsu.edu/digitalhumanities/faculty-research, exemplifying the DH Center's commitment to inclusivity under that broad umbrella approach.

Further efforts to strengthen institutional capacity ahead of the DH Center's launch included a year-long Digital Humanities Research Institute. Funded partially through an award from CUNY Graduate Center's Digital Humanities program, the Institute connected experienced DH scholars and practitioners with emerging researchers, facilitating mentorship and advisory relationships while highlighting resources that would eventually be available from the DH Center. Following the Center's opening, similar capacity-building events and workshops have continued.
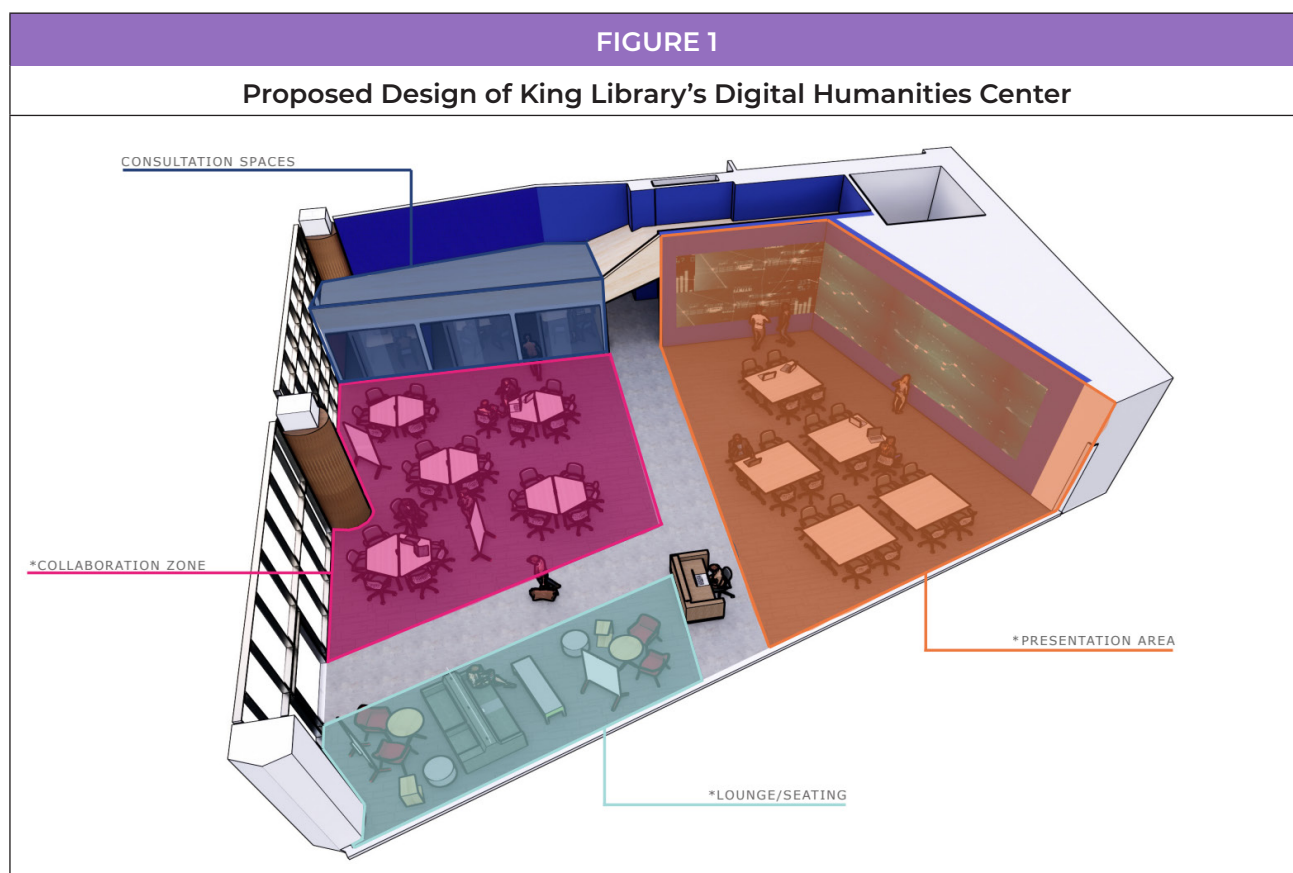
FIGURE 1

Proposed Design of King Library's Digital Humanities Center

CONSULTATION SPACES

*COLLABORATION ZONE

*PRESENTATION AREA

*LOUNGE/SEATING

FIGURE 2

Simulated Images of King Library's Digital Humanities Center

Now in the fourth year of the five-year grant period, we have successfully met the $375,000 fundraising goal ahead of schedule. The existing fundraising infrastructure, the expertise and dedication of development personnel, and the Library Marketing Team's strategic efforts—including social media engagement and crowdfunding campaigns—have been instrumental in achieving these fundraising milestones.

Grant Funded Infrastructure

The original design of the space was developed by two SJSU graduate students with input from organizational leaders. It focused on movable furniture, consultation spaces, and two 135" interactive digital screens across two walls of the existing space. The main goal was to keep the space as flexible as possible in its usage and arrangement.

There were also funds requested for computing infrastructure—potentially servers for web hosting or rendering and computational work. A set of laptops for instruction and a high-end scanner for digitization were also included in the proposal. As we've performed the more inclusive needs assessments described later in this paper, and as approaches to DH have evolved, some of the expected technology needs have changed. Most notably, we've had to pivot from larger video wall installations to multiple mobile screens and are rethinking the need for on-site computational resources. The NEH has been a good partner in allowing changes in timeline and equipment purchases but the limitations of the grant in regards to labor and renovation costs have been challenging. Sustainable funding for DH Center operations is tentatively provided by the three partners although we recognize ongoing funding for staffing and programming will be a major challenge.

Community Conversations

In preparing to open the center, it became clear that, while there are many digital humanities centers both inside and outside academic libraries, there were few, if any, whose example we would be able to follow precisely. In examining surveys and case studies on digital humanities centers located in academic libraries, engagement with the public beyond the institution is not a major theme, and is most often addressed through discussion of public history or public humanities.[14] Conversely, while public libraries, including SJPL, have prioritized initiatives that support digital equity,[15] we identified few current public library programs that are organized around the themes of digital humanities.[16] Despite the lack of examples, we are not alone in identifying the promise of this type of collaboration, as a recent report by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) leads with the recommendation that the digital scholarship community "build two-way streets for knowledge to travel between institutions and communities."[17]

Roopika Risam writes that "digital humanities, as a field, can only be inclusive and its diversity can only thrive in an environment in which local specificity—the unique concerns that influence and define digital humanities at regional and national levels—is positioned at its center and its global dimensions are outlined through an assemblage of the local."[18] In our case, attending to this local specificity has required an openness to the idea that we didn't know ahead of time exactly what kind of digital humanities center would serve the needs of our users. For digital humanities work to flourish in our local environment—in San José and at SJSU—we would need to focus our attention on the specific needs and aspirations of our overlapping user communities.

While we always strive to be responsive to the needs of our users, in this context, the need for input was particularly urgent. Beginning in fall of 2023, the three partners began an information gathering and needs-assessment process centered around a series of focus groups that we would call Community Conversations. The design of the Community Conversation process was guided by the expertise and experience of SJPL employees in planning community input activities, in addition to advice from Pamella Lach at San Diego State University's Digital Humanities Center, who generously shared the approach she used in collecting user input for that center.

Community Conversations Process

The Community Conversations process consisted of a total of eight 90-minute focus groups with approximately 85 participants. These included five sessions focused on SJSU staff and faculty, three sessions with San José community partners, and one in-class session for SJSU students studying digital humanities. When it proved challenging to recruit students for the longer focus group sessions, our team worked with SJSU's UX Librarian to create a cognitive mapping exercise designed to allow students to provide input with less time commitment. We held two drop-in sessions during which approximately 40 students provided input through the cognitive mapping exercise.

The eight focus group sessions followed a consistent outline. We began by welcoming the participants and offering each participant an opportunity to introduce themself. Following introductions, we provided an introduction to the concept of digital humanities. While we wanted to spend most of the session hearing from participants, we knew going into the process that digital humanities would be an unfamiliar or even challenging concept for many of them. For both professionals and patrons outside of academia, "humanities" was not always a familiar or resonant concept at first. Additionally, for faculty and staff within SJSU, we wanted to be sure to define "digital humanities" as broadly as possible. We began our introduction with a "broad umbrella" definition of the humanities, explicitly including interdisciplinary fields like ethnic studies and gender studies which combine methods from the humanities and the social sciences. We then outlined an inclusive definition of digital humanities, followed by examples. For the sessions we used the following definition, which is depicted in Figure 3: Digital Humanities can mean using digital technology to interrogate, investigate, or learn more about human culture and society, but it can also mean studying technology as a part of human culture or applying humanities methods to the study of technology.

FIGURE 3

Slide with Definition of Digital Humanities

What is Digital Humanities?

Digital Humanities (DH):

○ Using digital technology to interrogate, investigate, or learn more about human culture and society

But also:

○ Studying technology as a part of human culture; applying humanities methods to the study of technology


Sharing and discussing these definitions helped the team planning the center understand which concepts and modes of expression might be confusing or off-putting for our diverse audience. For example, one participant pointed out that the definition's use of the word "interrogate" struck them as incongruous and aggressive.

FIGURE 4

Slide Depicting Example Digital Humanities Projects

Digital Humanities can be:

- **Studying centuries of literature at once**, by analyzing them as data
- The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture

But also:

- **Collecting stories** that document the human consequences of contemporary regimes of migration and border control in the United States and Mexico
- Humanizando la Deportación / Humanizing Deportation, http://humanizandoladeportacion.ucdavis.edu/en/

HUMANIZANDO LA DEPORTACIÓN
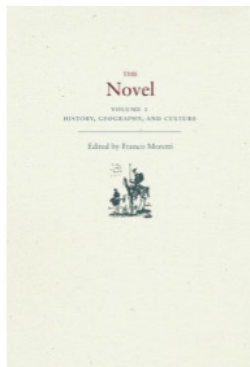
In the humanities context, "interrogate" can be a relatively neutral way of describing any number of critical approaches a scholar may take towards a text or other object of study. These small insights would accumulate during the sessions, helping us identify a broader approach that might be effective in creating a welcoming environment.

Mirroring our definition, we offered examples of digital humanities projects that were intended to capture the many types of work that can exist under the umbrella of digital humanities. Figure 4 depicts one of those pairings. On the one hand, digital humanities can include computational and distant reading approaches, as exemplified by Franco Moretti's imposing volume *The Novel*.[19] On the other, it can also include work that is focused on documenting the human consequences of contemporary regimes of power, like the *Humanizado la Deportación* project led by Robert Irwin.[20]

With this context in hand, participants engaged in two activities. First, a facilitated brainstorming session gave participants a chance to share their ideas for the center and to build on ideas suggested by others. The brainstorming prompts were deliberately broad, focused on the question "How might we imagine a digital humanities center on campus or in the community?" Depending on the size of the group, our team would choose to split the group into smaller discussions, or to hold the brainstorming session with the entire group.

After reporting back from the brainstorming activity, participants were prompted to engage in a short charette activity. During this activity, each participant worked alone for a set amount of time, responding to a series of more personal prompts. Participants were encouraged to sketch in whatever format they found comfortable, with most choosing, drawing, note taking, or a combination of both. While the charette approach is more traditionally associated with longer sessions,[21] often following an inquiry by design approach, we found that this modified approach was effective in encouraging participants to share their ideas and aspirations for the center. Participants received four prompts, which varied depending on the affiliations of the participants. As an example, SJSU faculty and staff were asked "How could the humanities be valuable in the digital? What are some concerns about digital humanities?" Figure 5 contains example images that participants created during this activity.

FIGURE 5

**Example Participant Responses from Charette Activity**
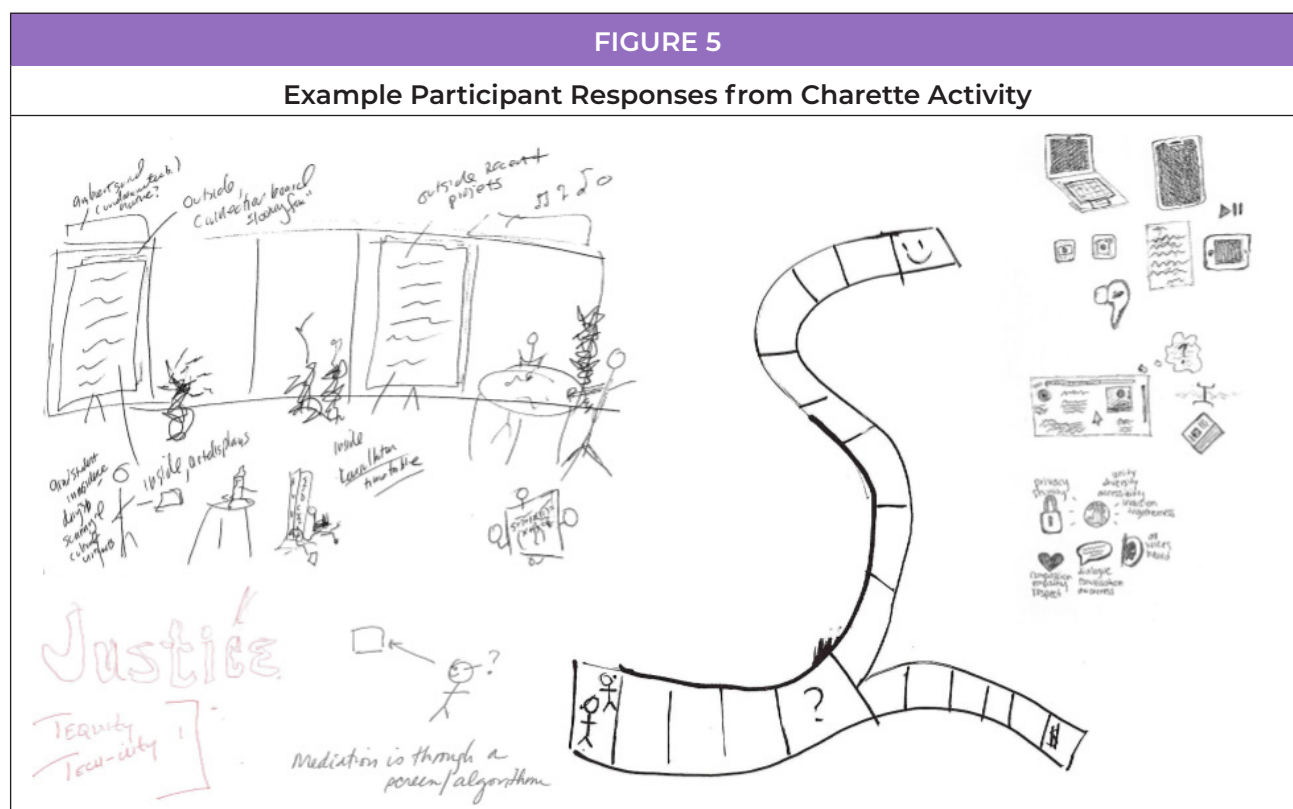
Following the charette activity, participants were given an opportunity to debrief and share additional thoughts or questions. While we will discuss the specific input that participants shared below, the project team was struck by the effectiveness of the sessions in encouraging open discussion, and was extremely grateful to the participants for their enthusiasm and commitment to shaping the center.

While the focus group approach was effective in working with community partners and SJSU employees, it proved to be challenging to engage with students in that format. In order to create additional opportunities, we offered two drop-in sessions using a cognitive mapping approach. Cognitive mapping is a user testing approach that asks participants to create a drawing of a space, service, or experience that reflects their own perception of it.[22] This approach allowed students to provide their input in as little as five minutes. Students received the following prompt:

We are building a Digital Humanities Center to support students using digital tools in their classes and research.

- Draw a space in the library you would like to use.
- Draw the type of events that would attract you to the space.
- Draw a project you would make using digital tools.

Students could respond to the prompt using paper, or by writing on whiteboard tables within the space. The tables allowed students to see earlier responses, which may have encouraged more enthusiastic and open participation. Example student responses are included in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6

**Example Participant Responses from the Cognitive Mapping Activity**
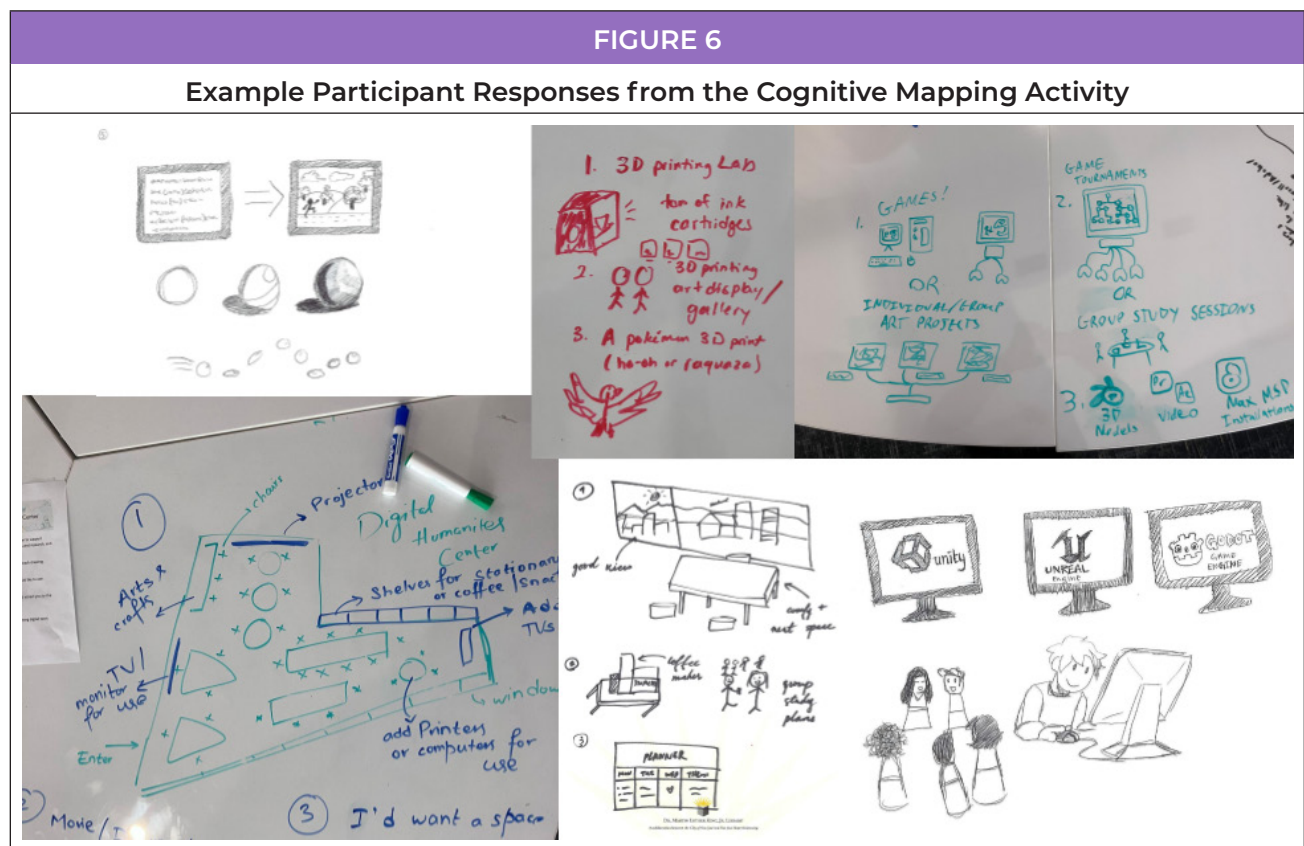
Community Conversations Analysis and Results

The community conversations produced a number of artifacts that reflected the input of participants, including images of notes and drawings from the brainstorming, charette, and cognitive mapping activities. Team members collected these artifacts and coded them for further analysis. Coded data was used alongside more

holistic interpretive methods in order to draw a broad set of conclusions from the Community Conversations process.

Coding focused on identifying repeating themes, and did not attempt to capture every idea or theme that came up in the sessions. This resulted in a dataset with 335 individual themes or ideas. For each of these items, team members recorded a brief summary along with information on the date, user group, and the exercise or prompt that elicited the response. Initial analysis of the data was conducted using a Voyant Dashboard.[23] A word cloud demonstrating recurring themes in user input is included as Figure 7.

FIGURE 7

Word Cloud of Most Frequent Themes Referenced in User Input
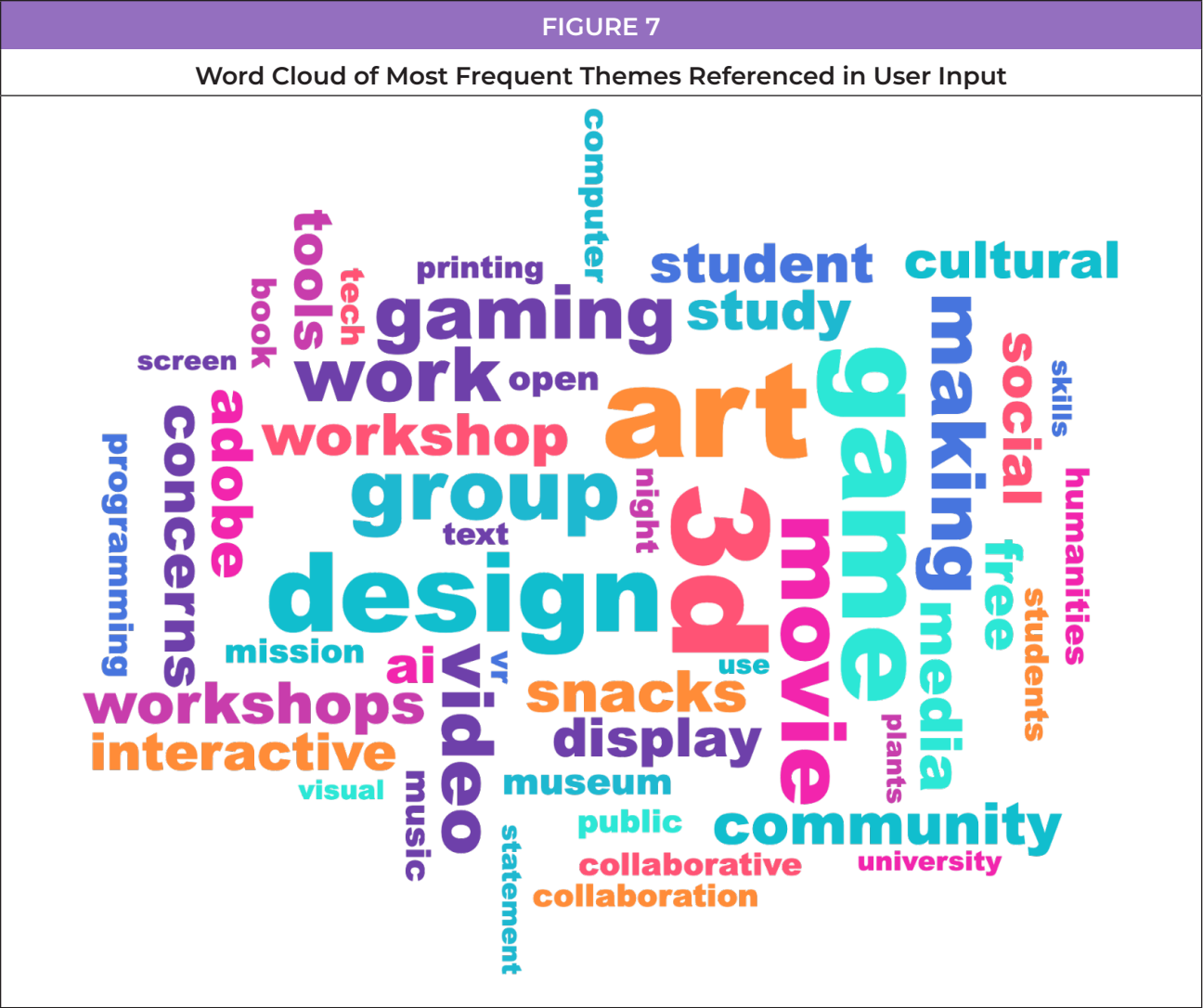
The focus of data analysis was on producing actionable insights into the needs and aspirations of potential users of the digital humanities center. In order to organize the large volume of input we had received, the project team began to map the ideas that participants shared to a set of user expectations and potential programming models for the center. The idea of organizing input into programming models emerged organically during the input sessions and data analysis. Because most participants had few, if any, preconceived notions of how a digital humanities center in a joint library would operate, many suggestions were based on activities associated with more familiar spaces like art galleries, cafés, and event spaces. These activities outlined a number of different programming models that users envisioned for the center:

- Third Space: A cozy, lounge-like area for study and socializing.
- Exhibition Space: Showcasing art, digital projects, and interactive displays.
- Event Space: Hosting performances, lectures, and public events.
- Collaborative Hub: Facilitating project collaboration and workshops.
- Educational Enrichment: Offering hands-on learning and K-12 programming.
- Creation Space: Providing a workspace for individual and group projects.
- Informational Space: Serving as a welcome and information center.
- Project Enabler: Offering consultation and technical support for projects

The library's report on the Community Conversations contains more detail about specific aspects of these programming models.[24] At a higher level, though, this analysis reveals a wide variety of unmet needs that participants felt a digital humanities center might help to address. At the same time, it suggests that the idea of a digital humanities center was, for many participants, a blank canvas on which they could project a variety of possible visions.

In addition to the eight programming models identified in the process, we identified five core or expected services that participants expected the center to offer upon opening. There is some clear overlap between the two lists, but while the programming models reflect the ways that participants imagine the space evolving over time, these services represent expectations that the participants had in the shorter term. Put differently, the programming models represent participants' aspirations for the space, while core services represent a baseline set of expectations. The five core services identified were:

- Events
- Exhibitions
- Project collaboration and consultation
- Workshops
- Workspace

While there is overlap between participants' aspirations and their expectations, it has been helpful in our planning process to consider them separately. We heard many wonderful, creative, and unexpected ideas during this process, and we wanted to create a structure in our analysis that would preserve those ideas for future consideration, even if they were not all achievable in the short term.

In order to further preserve this input, the report includes sections on strategic and thematic ideas suggested by participants, as well as a section on specific thematic tensions that emerged during the discussions. For example, participants' input suggested a high-level tension between conceptions of technology as an industry and technology as a site of ethical exploration, perhaps reflecting our center's location in the largest city in Silicon Valley. These sections reflect the participants' vision for the center as a place where innovation can occur in a welcoming space that fosters belonging. Clusters of thematic ideas that reflect these concerns included diversity, inclusion, belonging; ethics, values, critical intervention; local history, San José; wellness; and on-ramps to digital work.

While participants focused on their ambitions for the center, they did identify two key high-level challenges and concerns. One of these is specific to the location of our center. Located on the first floor of a busy downtown library, and featuring large windows that look out on a popular plaza, the space is both acoustically and visually open to the rest of the library. Participants identified sound and distraction as key concerns that would need to be overcome in the design of programming for the space.

The second concern is one that may apply more broadly to other libraries engaged in public-facing digital humanities. Participants repeatedly indicated that the concept of "digital humanities" was an obstacle for them, or for communities that they work with. While some participants found the concept confusing, others expressed that they understood the concept but found that it didn't resonate with them or their work. Participants responded positively to the introduction the team provided during the Community Conversations sessions, but

expressed concern that many potential users of the center wouldn't find the name or mission of the center immediately legible.

Finally, the project team identified five short-term recommendations to guide the center in its first year:

- Recommendation #1—Prioritize expected functions on opening but be prepared to evolve
- Recommendation #2—Naming and branding that communicates the center's values
- Recommendation #3—Themed programming
- Recommendation #4—Create opportunities for fellows and affiliates
- Recommendation #5—Interactive elements that foreground sound

These recommendations point to an achievable set of goals that is responsive to the expectations and challenges present in the data. While more detail on each recommendation is available in the report, what we hope may be more relevant to other libraries is the process of moving from a large amount of community input to a set of conclusions that includes a small set of recommendations, yet also retains important ideas and insights that the center may be able to return to as it evolves.

Putting Recommendations into Practice

The Community Conversations process has been critical in shaping the work of King Library's Digital Humanities Center, and it has had a particular impact in creating a basis for collaborative work and a sense of shared goals between the center's three partners. The center celebrated a soft opening on October 15, 2024, and we expect its operations to evolve dramatically in the coming years. Focusing on the core expectations identified by participants, the center has been active in sponsoring and hosting events; in supporting digital projects by providing consultation and hosting on the center's Omeka S instance; in offering a series of publicly available workshops; and in providing a comfortable workspace during times when the center is not otherwise occupied.

At the level of planning and governance, the Community Conversations process paved the way for the creation of the center's Program Planning Committee. This committee has a flexible membership, and while there is strong representation from the three partners, the committee is open to participation from other stakeholders. Regular participants have included the Career Center, as well as students and faculty involved in planning center-affiliated events like World Information Architecture Day San José. This flexible structure would be usual within any one of our partner organizations, but it has provided opportunities for serendipitous and unexpected collaboration, and opened up avenues of communication between university and public library employees. The Community Conversation process was one factor in creating a shared sense that some level of flexibility and uncertainty might not only be tolerable, but preferable at this early stage in the center's evolution. That shared openness to an evolutionary process is reflected in the flexible structure of the center's Program Planning Committee.

As one example of the deep collaboration that the center has been able to foster, the center's soft opening celebration featured six projects that embody the diversity of approaches and orientations that the center embraces. These projects included Placemats, a collaborative weaving project led by SJSU faculty member Kim A. Brillante Knight;[25] SJPL's Retro Tech program; a virtual reality project created by SJSU students working in the library's virtual reality lab; and a demonstration of Adobe's Firefly image generation software. The full layout of projects is included as Figure 8. In addition to these widely varied projects, a slideshow during the event featured over 25 additional projects, reflecting the breadth of digital humanities work already underway at SJSU, SJPL, and in the broader San José community.

As an additional point of emphasis, the center has succeeded in creating Digital Scholarship Fellowships for students working in the center. These student positions have been critical in the early operation of the center, but more importantly they provide the opportunity for students to pursue self-directed projects, including the development of workshops that allow them to share their areas of expertise and the creation of other original, student-focused programming within the center.

FIGURE 8

Layout of Innovation Stations for the Digital Humanities Center Soft Opening, October 15, 2024

Innovation Stations

1. **Placemats: Collaborative Digital Weaving, Kim Knight**
2. **ModLark: Mobile Device and Laptop Orchestra, Christopher Luna-Mega**
3. **VR with Google Maps, KLEVR Lab**
4. **Retro Tech, VR, and more from San José Public Library, Kyle Burkett, Michael Lara, Natasha Lowell**
5. **Adobe Firefly, Raymond Lam**
6. **Color Organ, Nick Szydlowski and Aditi Rajesh Shah**
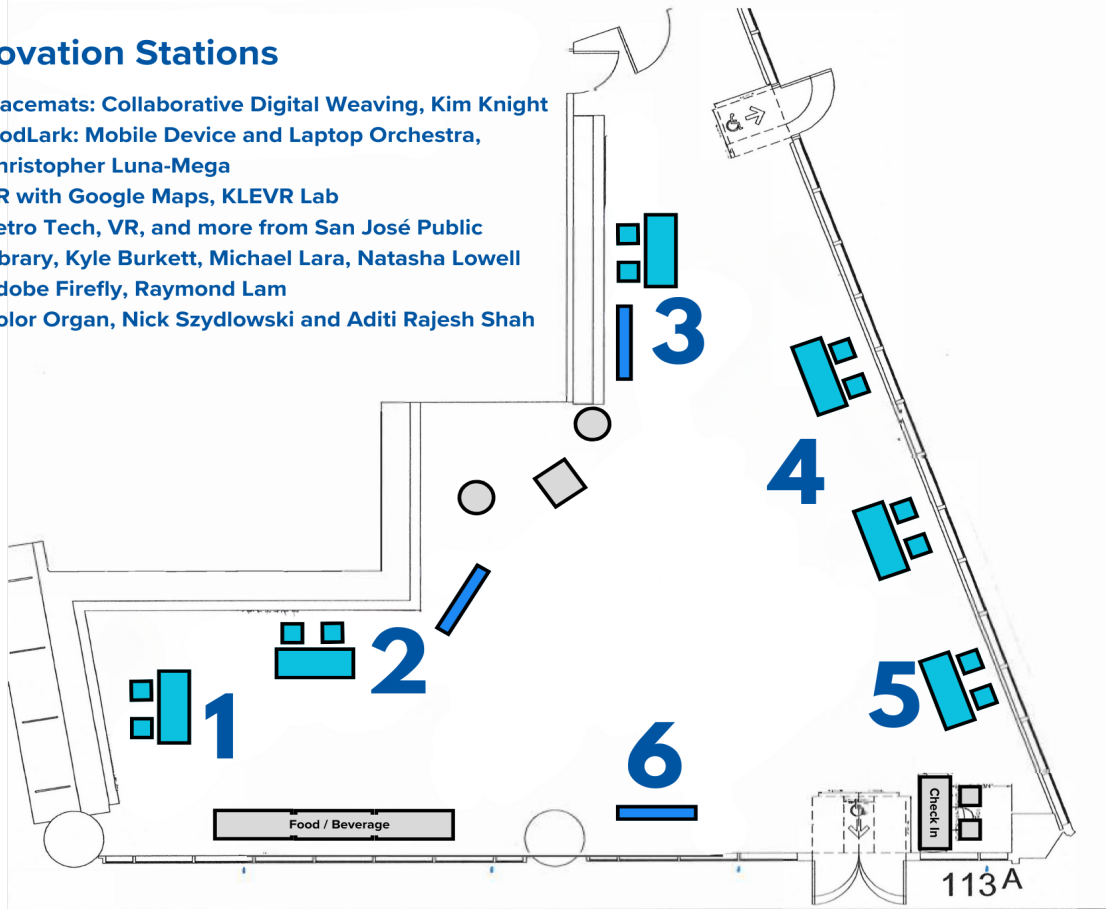
In addition to the opening event, all three partners contributed programming during the center's first several months, creating numerous opportunities for cross-pollination between our user communities. SJSU College of Humanities and the Arts brought noted digital humanities scholar Lauren Klein to the center, for a talk titled "Data Feminism for AI," which filled the center and attracted hundreds more participants virtually. A highlight of San José Public Library's programming has been the Digital Dialogs Book Club series, featuring works of fiction that connect readers to the themes of the center. SJSU Library has hosted an ongoing series of workshops that aim to make digital humanities work accessible to anyone, and which attract a diverse audience of students, staff, faculty, and public library patrons. These are just a few examples of the way the "broad umbrella" approach to digital humanities has opened up possibilities for rich, engaging programming and for an ever-expanding network of potential collaboration.

Conclusion

While our center's context in a joint-use library provides a distinctive set of opportunities and challenges, many of the themes that emerged in our Community Conversations are likely relevant to any digital humanities center that aspires to work beyond academia and reach a broader public, or even to work with students and faculty in

disciplines outside of the humanities. While digital humanities centers are not new, we found that the concept was unfamiliar to most of our participants.

While this unfamiliarity presents a challenge in the area of branding and communication, it also contains a major opportunity to define the operations of a public-facing digital humanities center in a way that is responsive to real needs and aspirations identified by potential users of the center. In order to achieve this in a way that serves the overlapping user bases of our three partners, deep collaboration has been required. The Community Conversation process has been a key step in establishing shared goals and aspirations for the project, and in setting the tone for a collaborative and flexible environment that has allowed the center to thrive in its first months.

Returning to the recent ACLS report, its call for "new modes of mutually determined and mutually supportive interactions between academic institutions and their geographically and socially adjacent communities"[26] resonates strongly with the deep collaboration we are building with this project. It also suggests that this mode of collaboration may hold promise even for digital humanities centers not located in joint-use libraries. Perhaps digital humanities centers and public libraries are actually natural collaborators in the project of addressing gaps in digital equity and facilitating community-centered scholarship that recovers forgotten and untold stories.

To this point, that deep collaboration has required flexibility and openness to change from all participants. At some point in the center's evolution, it is possible that more structure will emerge, and some of the current flexibility will recede. However, many Community Conversations participants emphasized the need for the center and its offerings to evolve over time, and to remain open to change and new possibilities. Participants even suggested specific organizational structures, such as rotating or modular leadership positions, which might help the center remain flexible and responsive over time. Whatever direction the center takes, we hope this case study may be valuable to others as an example of a process in which three complex and different institutional partners were able to collaborate and create something new together.

Notes

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