

# Where do they go? 10 years of professional choices by Digital Humanities Masters graduates (and what we might learn from them)

**Edmond, Jennifer**

edmondj@tcd.ie

Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

In 2011, Trinity College Dublin launched its MPhil (Masters Programme) in Digital Humanities and Culture. Since then 64 students have completed the programme. *But where did they go?* In spite of 10 years' experience of running the programme, at the time of the its review and revision in 2019, the question of how the study of the Digital Humanities at postgraduate level was actually being put to use had never been formally addressed, nor had changing student needs been integrated into the curriculum. Given that the programme had come under threat of cancellation, and indeed had been suspended for the years of 2015-2017, this seemed an urgent need to address.

Through LinkedIn connections, personal networks, web searches and follow-up interactions and interviews, we now know the professional pathways of 43 of those who completed the programme, and can point to five distinct destination pathways for our graduates: research; media and communications; industry; policy and public service; and the cultural heritage sector. Interestingly, the original curriculum was to primarily focussed on only two of these, cultural heritage and research.

Revising the curriculum to meet the needs implied within this expanded understanding of student destinations took several forms. Two of the original mandatory core courses were replaced with new options that would significantly refocus the course as a whole. The first of these, *Techno-Cultural Systems*, was designed to bring the lessons of the digital humanities - from modelling to metadata to visualisation - together with the everyday life experiences as a technology user. Its weekly dossiers assemble news reports recording cultural-technological tensions with readings from the digital humanities, but also science and technology studies, philosophy, computer science, critical theory, and the arts, in order to help students apply their digital humanities skills to the world around them. In this manner, we equip our students to envision "what the humanities ... have to offer computer science; and, beyond that, what the humanities themselves can bring to the understanding of computing and the shaping of the digital." (Hall 2011, p.2)

The second new core module, *Building Digital Humanities Projects*, gives students hands-on practice working with data and software so as to realise a prototype DH project, including a significant focus on data management as well as analysis and presentation. In this module, we attempt to balance acquisition of a basic digital humanities software toolkit, the meta-level skillset of research data management, and the formation of independent and problem-focussed learners, able to undertake acts of "critical making" (Ratto 2011) in the cultural space.

We also revised the existing internship programme. As originally conceived, the internships had been sponsor-driven, with

students bidding for those internships that most appealed to them. In the revised model, internships are instead student-driven. Individuals are asked to nominate the context they want to work in, and given the chance to explore their interests in conversation with the course director. The course director must maintain a much larger pool of potential host organisations than before, but the return on this investment in terms of student engagement and value to the host organisation is far greater, as each placement is built around a project idea reflecting the intersection of the organisations' needs and the interests and competences of one or more students. This model also has allowed us to refine the concept of what we mean by an 'internship,' many aspects of the traditional models for which (in which internships are paid, are full-time and often utilise only low-level skillsets) are not appropriate for Masters-level students with significant parallel commitments. Instead, we envision these engagements as "projects in the community" (Rockwell and Sinclair 2012, p.182).

This new vision of why someone might undertake digital humanities training was also expressed through a variety of marketing materials, including a 3-minute animated film and student perspective videos. As a result of these changes, recruitment has essentially doubled in each of the three years since its relaunch.

## Bibliography

- Hall, Gary** (2011) "The Digital Humanities Beyond Computing: A Postscript." *Culture Machine*, 11.
- Ratto, Matt** (2011) "Critical Making: Conceptual and Material Studies in Technology and Social Life." *The Information Society* 27, no. 4): 252-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2011.583819>.
- Rockwell, Geoffrey, / Stéfan Sinclair** (2015) "Acculturation and the Digital Humanities Community." In *Digital Humanities Pedagogy : Practices, Principles and Politics* edited by Brett D. Hirsch, 177-211. Digital Humanities Series. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers. <http://books.openedition.org/obp/1635>.