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## **“This Is Why We Fight”: Defining the Values of the Digital Humanities**

LISA SPIRO

Even as the digital humanities (DH) is being hailed as the “next big thing,” members of the DH community have been debating what counts as digital humanities and what does not, who is in and who is out, and whether DH is about making or theorizing, computation or communication, practice or politics. Soon after William Pannapacker declared the arrival of digital humanities at the Modern Languages Association (MLA) conference in 2009 (Pannapacker, “The MLA and the Digital Humanities”), David Parry wrote a much-debated blog post insisting that DH should aim to “challenge and change scholarship” rather than “us[e] computers to ‘tag up Milton’” (Parry). MLA 2011 unleashed another round of debates, as Pannapacker pointed to a DH in-crowd, an ironic label for a group of people who have long felt like misfits (Pannapacker, “Digital Humanities Triumphant?”).

Although the debate has generated intellectual energy and compelling exchanges, it also has left me frustrated by statements that seem to devalue the work of fellow digital humanists and longing for a more coherent sense of community. Even as we debate the digital humanities, We need to participate in a frank discussion about what connects us and what values we hold in common. Given that the digital humanities community includes people with different disciplines, methodological approaches, professional roles, and theoretical inclinations, it is doubtful that we will settle on a tight definition of the digital humanities—just witness the many definitions of the term offered by participants in the Day of Digital Humanities (“How do you define Humanities Computing/Digital Humanities?”). Instead of trying to pigeonhole digital humanities by prescribing particular methods or theoretical approaches, we can instead focus on a community that comes together around values such as openness and collaboration. As Matt Kirschenbaum suggests, “the digital humanities today is about a scholarship (and a pedagogy) that is publicly visible in ways to which we are generally unaccustomed, a scholarship and pedagogy that are bound up with infrastructure in ways that are deeper and

more explicit than we are generally accustomed to, a scholarship and pedagogy that are collaborative and depend on networks of people and that live an active, 24-7 life online" (Kirschenbaum, 6). How the digital humanities community operates—transparently, collaboratively, through online networks—distinguishes it. Even as we acknowledge points of difference, I propose that the digital humanities community develop a flexible statement of values that it can use to communicate its identity to itself and the general public, guide its priorities, and perhaps heal its divisions. Rather than debating who is in and who is out, the DH community needs to develop a keener sense of what it stands for and what is at stake in its work. Taking an initial step toward this goal, I will discuss the rationale for creating a core values statement by drawing on the literature about professional codes, suggest a process for engaging the community in developing a values statement, explore models for and influences on DH values, and analyze the DH literature to put forward potential values.

### *Why the Digital Humanities Community Needs a Statement of Values*

By creating a core set of values, the digital humanities community may be able to unite to confront challenges such as the lack of open access to information and hide-bound policies that limit collaboration and experimentation. As Kathleen Fitzpatrick notes of the digital humanities, "the key problems that we face again and again are social rather than technological in nature: problems of encouraging participation in collaborative and collective projects, of developing sound preservation and sustainability practices, of inciting institutional change, of promoting new ways of thinking about how academic work might be done in the coming years" (Fitzpatrick, "Reporting from the Digital Humanities 2010 Conference"). Solving such problems is not simple, but an important first step may be articulating shared values that can then be used to define goals, develop collaborations, and foster participation. Most professional organizations advance a set of values or an ethical code to make clear their aspirations, set standards of behavior, "provide the foundation of institutional mission and guide professional practice and decision making" (Miller, 5). Further, values statements can enable groups to confront change while remaining true to their overarching principles (Bell).

Yet even as they help to define a community, values statements can also confine it, reflecting a static understanding of the organization or the particular biases of a powerful clique that defines the standards. Finding consensus on the few values held in common by the community is difficult (Weissinger); indeed, dissensus plays an important role in pressing an organization to consider blind spots and alternative perspectives. Thus organizations must seek community-wide input on values statements and view them as flexible and contextual rather than fixed and eternal. As I suggest later in the section "How to Produce a Values Statement," the DH community should reflect its own spirit of collaboration and flexibility in

developing a values statement, opening up the process to participation via wikis and other social media.

This essay will focus on values rather than specific ethical guidelines. Whereas values “represent closely held belief[s] and ideal[s],” ethics “are stated guidelines attempting to describe standards and inform behavior so that the behavior will meet these standards” (Miller, 8). A statement of values is typically broader than an ethical code and serves in part to inspire and to help an organization set priorities, defining what it holds most important. Professional codes such as ethical guidelines or values statements fulfill several functions, including providing guidance for professionals, shaping the public’s expectations of the profession, promoting professional socialization, improving the profession’s reputation, “preserv[ing] entrenched professional biases,” preventing unethical actions, supporting professionals in their decision making, and adjudicating disputes (Frankel, 111–12). While a statement of values won’t settle debates in the digital humanities (nor should it), it will at least frame them and provide the grounds for conversation. The digital humanities profession, loosely configured as it is, has matured to the point where it needs a values statement to help articulate its mission.

#### HOW TO PRODUCE A VALUES STATEMENT

Producing a values statement is difficult, since it requires you to synthesize what matters to a community even as you recognize areas of potential disagreement. (As a good humanist, I am well aware of the contingencies, ideologies, and contexts that shape values.) I believe that articulating a set of values *for* a community should be done *by* the community. The process of producing a values statement may be as important as the statement itself, since that process will embody how the community operates and what it embraces. Thus the values statement should not come down on high from a Committee that meets in private, then delivers its decrees to the community. Instead, the DH community should enact an open, participatory, iterative, networked process to develop its values statement. The statement itself should be created and disseminated on a wiki, so that one can see it change from version to version, review the discussion history, and understand the dynamic, collaborative nature of knowledge creation. The community should engage in diverse efforts to solicit input and foster conversation, such as online forums, face-to-face discussions at digital humanities conferences and unconferences, and blog posts exploring key values. To ensure that the code of values is not narrowly focused but reflects the needs of the larger community, wide input should be solicited from outsiders as well as “insiders” (Frankel). But someone needs to kick off the discussion, which is what I aim to do in this essay.

In defining core values, the community needs to consider what it is excluding as well as the cultural and ideological contexts surrounding the values it promotes. Given the diversity of the community and the ways in which culture informs values,

it may be difficult to arrive at consensus on the core values (Koehler). Indeed, it is likely that creating a set of core values will stimulate further debate, since different subcommunities and even individuals will have their own views about what values are most important and whether it even makes sense to come up with a core values statement. Stated values can come into conflict with the "values in practice" of community members (Morgan, Mason, and Nahon, 8). For example, the Wikipedia community split over a debate whether to include a controversial cartoon representing the prophet Muhammad in a Wikipedia article about the publication of that cartoon by a Danish newspaper, as the value of freedom of information clashed with that of "multicultural inclusivity" (Morgan, Mason, and Nahon, 9). But if the process of developing values is handled fairly and openly, conflicts can be defused and healthy discussion can move the community forward. The process of developing a set of values for the DH community can prompt self-reflection and conversation, helping the profession to mature. These values should serve as beacons illuminating different paths rather than rigid rules constraining choices. Even as the community recognizes that values are contextual rather than fixed, the process of developing a values statement can spark a concrete discussion about what the digital humanities is trying to achieve and can produce a living document that can help guide planning and decision making.

#### **TOWARD A SET OF DIGITAL HUMANITIES VALUES**

In developing a set of values, the digital humanities community can draw from several sources that reflect its own diverse influences. The values of the digital humanities represent a convergence of several sets of values, including those of the humanities; libraries, museums, and cultural heritage organizations; and networked culture. In some ways, these values can come into conflict, which may be contributing to the ongoing debates about the digital humanities. Yet at their core, they share a common aim to advance knowledge, foster innovation, and serve the public.

The values of the humanities provide the foundation for the digital humanities. Indeed, the humanities are typically defined by their focus on aesthetics and values (American Council of Learned Societies). Among core humanistic values are inquiry, critical thinking, debate, pluralism, balancing innovation and tradition, and exploration and critique (Levine et al.). Yet contemporary humanities scholarship also recognizes that values are not universal or fixed but rather reflect particular contexts and ideologies: "At its best, contemporary humanistic thinking does not peddle ideology, but rather attempts to sensitize us to the presence of ideology in our work, and to its capacity to delude us into promoting as universal values that in fact belong to one nation, one social class, one sect" (Levine et al.). We cannot assume that the values of one culture are shared by another culture; rather, values reveal the ideologies and interests of those who hold them.

The professional values of academic humanities scholars are to some extent narrower than general humanistic values, as manifested in the insistence on solo

scholarship, specialization, and scholarly authority. For example, defending the humanities against conservative attacks on academic specialization and literary theory such as Lynne Cheney's *Humanities in America*, the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) report *Speaking for the Humanities* insists on the importance of professionalization: "It is precisely because teachers of the humanities take their subject seriously that they become specialists, allow themselves to be professionals rather than amateurs—belle lettrists who unselfconsciously sustain traditional hierarchies, traditional social and cultural exclusions, assuming that their audience is both universal and homogeneous" (Levine et al.). Driven by a conservative political agenda, *Humanities in America* takes a limited view in insisting that humanities scholarship should focus solely on "timeless . . . truth—and beauty and excellence" (Cheney, 7). Further, it is important to defend expert knowledge and the academic profession. However, the emphasis, in *Speaking for the Humanities*, on professionalization reinforces hierarchy and reveals its own elitism in its assumption that nonprofessionals will naively uphold "traditional hierarchies." Likewise, *Speaking for the Humanities* celebrates the challenge to authority and objective knowledge represented by contemporary theory but insists on the authority of the professoriate, proclaiming that the "competence of the best scholars in the humanities today is remarkable" (Levine et al.). In a sense, these values focus more on asserting the importance of scholarly authority and professional identity than on how scholars work and what they do for society.

Such emphasis on specialization and professional authority clashes with the collaborative, crowdsourced approaches of the digital humanities—though the digital humanities, too, wrestles with questions of how to value expert knowledge. As Ed Ayers suggests, IT culture and academic culture often clash, as IT is "highly unstable . . . designed to be transparent," and has "all work performed by anonymous teams," while the academy is "the most stable institution across the world . . . opaque and labyrinth," and "centered on scholarly stars" (Ayers, "The Academic Culture and the IT Culture"). The digital humanities represents a partial blending of these two cultures. Perhaps because the digital humanities includes people representing different professional positions (faculty, librarians, technologists, museum professionals, passionate amateurs, and others) and often deliberately pursues a public role for scholarship (whether through creating freely accessible digital archives or supporting networked discussion of ideas), it often better serves values such as pluralism and innovation than do the professional values of the traditional academic humanities, which often seem to be crouched in a defensive posture.

Yet the formal values statements of professional humanities organizations do offer important principles that can guide the digital humanities, including inquiry, respect, debate, and integrity. As befits a scholarly organization, the American Historical Association's (AHA) "Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct" does not simply list particular scholarly values but rather explores and contextualizes them in an essay. The document emphasizes the importance of "critical dialogue"

and demonstrating "trust and respect both of one's peers and of the public at large" (American Historical Association), embracing a public role for historical scholarship. While "practicing history with integrity does not mean being neutral or having no point of view," it does require "mutual respect and constructive criticism . . . awareness of one's own biases and a readiness to follow sound method and analysis wherever they may lead," and recognizing "the receipt of any financial support" (American Historical Association). AHA's values statement seeks a balance between critical dialogue and integrity, recognizing the importance of staking out a position yet also of honoring evidence. Likewise, the Modern Language Association's code of professional ethics emphasizes freedom of inquiry, while admitting that it can come into conflict with other values. Thus the MLA acknowledges that "this freedom carries with it the responsibilities of professional conduct," including integrity, respect for diversity, and fairness (Modern Language Association, "MLA Statement of Professional Ethics").

Since the digital humanities encompasses fields such as librarianship in addition to humanities disciplines, we should also look to models such as the American Library Association's (ALA) "Core Values of Librarianship." Adopted in 2004, this list of eleven values emphasizes the civic role that libraries play in promoting access, confidentiality/privacy, democracy, diversity, education and lifelong learning, intellectual freedom, preservation, the public good, professionalism, service, and social responsibility (American Library Association). Whereas the values statements of the academic organizations emphasize what scholars do (pursue inquiry) and how they do it (with integrity), the ALA focuses on providing service and upholding the public good through access, lifelong learning, and intellectual freedom. Bridging these two communities, the digital humanities community brings together core scholarly values such as critical dialogue and free inquiry with an ethic focused on the democratic sharing of ideas.

In a sense, the digital humanities reconfigures the humanities for the Internet age, leveraging networked technologies to exchange ideas, create communities of practice, and build knowledge. *The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0* deliberately sets the digital humanities in the context of traditional humanistic values, arguing that DH seeks to revitalize them in a time when culture is shifting from print to digital forms of knowledge dissemination: "Knowledge of the Humanities as constituted in the modern university has shaped lives, conveyed critical skills, provided a moral compass for human experiences, given pleasure and satisfaction, inspired acts of generosity and heroism. Digital Humanities represent an effort not to downplay or 'downsize' these traditional merits but, on the contrary, to reassert and reinterpret their value in an era when our relation to information, knowledge, and cultural heritage is radically changing, when our entire cultural legacy as a species is migrating to digital formats" (UCLA Mellon Seminar in Digital Humanities). Even as the humanities continue to make a vital contribution to society, they must be "reassert[ed] and reinterpret[ed]" in a networked age. Whereas the traditional



humanities typically value originality, authority, and authorship—an ethos based in part on the scarcity of information and the perceived need for gatekeepers—the *Digital Humanities Manifesto* instead promotes remixing, openness, and the wisdom of the crowd. For the digital humanities, information is not a commodity to be controlled but a social good to be shared and reused.

Internet values themselves grow out of the humanistic mission to explore and exchange ideas. As Tim O'Reilly argues, "Just as the Copernican revolution was part of a broader social revolution that turned society away from hierarchy and received knowledge, and instead sparked a spirit of inquiry and knowledge sharing, open source is part of a communications revolution designed to maximize the free sharing of ideas expressed in code" (O'Reilly). With the development of the Internet and of open-source technologies come new ways to communicate information and ideas, build communities, and promote the growth of knowledge. The digital humanities, dubbed "Humanities 2.0" by Cathy Davidson, likewise promote openness, participation, and community (Davidson).

Indeed, Internet values, as manifested in the ethos of open source, infuse the digital humanities. As Tom Scheinfeldt argues, the digital humanities community operates much like a "social network," nimble and connected: "Digital humanities takes more than tools from the Internet. It works like the Internet. It takes its values from the Internet" (Scheinfeldt, "Stuff Digital Humanists Like"). Like the Internet, the digital humanities community is distributed rather than centralized, built on trust and the freedom to invent. Yet we might also say that, like the Internet, the digital humanities community needs protocols—values—to guide its development. As Scheinfeldt suggests, we can see these Internet values reflected in the DH community's focus on openness, iterative development, and transparency, as well as in its adoption of open-source approaches to code development and community education.

In some ways, the values of print culture (which is identified with the traditional humanities) clash with those of Internet culture. As Kathleen Fitzpatrick, citing Lawrence Lessig, explains, "the networks of electronic communication carry embedded values within the codes that structure their operation, and many of the Internet's codes, and thus its values, are substantively different from those within which scholars—or at least those in the humanities—profess to operate. We must examine our values, and the ways that our new technologies may affect them, in order to make the most productive use of those new forms" (*Planned Obsolescence*). According to Fitzpatrick, the values of print authorship are typically "individuality, originality, completeness, ownership," while the values of the Internet include "open, shared protocols and codes" (*Planned Obsolescence*). At their core, both sets of values aim to promote the exchange of ideas and the progress of knowledge, but print (at least in the tradition of academic prose) typically gives greater emphasis to authority and ownership, while digital scholarship values access, conversation, fluidity, and collaboration. Likewise, Paula Petrik contrasts the ethos of traditional



humanities scholarship with the ethos of digital humanities scholarship. Whereas the traditional humanities are text based and nontechnical and value solitary, specialized work resulting in a book, the digital humanities are collaborative and technical, value design, and are built upon shared information resources ("Digital Scholarship in the University Tenure and Promotion Process").

Grounded in humanistic values but catalyzed by Internet values, the digital humanities seeks to push the humanities into new territory by promoting collaboration, openness, and experimentation. Although no professional organization in the digital humanities has, to my knowledge, crafted a values statement, we can find sources for such a statement in ongoing discussions in blogs and articles, the mission statements of DH centers, and digital humanities manifestos. Taking a witty, pragmatic look at "Stuff Digital Humanists Like," Tom Scheinfeldt points to open social networks (Twitter vs. Facebook), agile development (rapid, iterative), do-it-yourself (building, making), PHP (simplicity, accessibility), and extramural grants (innovation, collaboration) ("Stuff Digital Humanists Like"). Scheinfeldt's list captures much of what animates the digital humanities community, expressing this description in terms of core technologies and technical approaches. In Diane Zorich's study of digital humanities centers, she distills key values as expressed in their mission statements, including "the enduring value of the humanities, collaboration and cross-disciplinarity, openness, civic and social responsibility, and questioning sacred cows" (Zorich). Even as the digital humanities insist on the importance of the humanities, they also seek to transform practices (or "sacred cows") such as tenure, publication, and peer review and to promote collaboration, cross-disciplinarity, and public responsibility. *The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0* advances values such as openness (open access, open source), collaboration, multiplicity, participation, "scholarly innovation, disciplinary cross-fertilization, and the democratization of knowledge" (UCLA Mellon Seminar in Digital Humanities). Likewise, the Paris "Manifesto for the Digital Humanities" focuses on defining the DH community as "solidary, open, welcoming and freely accessible . . . multilingual and multidisciplinary," and favoring "the advancement of knowledge, the improvement of research quality in our disciplines, the enrichment of knowledge and of collective patrimony, in the academic sphere and beyond it" ("Manifesto for the Digital Humanities"). Running throughout these statements is an overarching sense that the digital humanities should promote traditional humanistic values such as access to knowledge and civic responsibility by embracing collaboration, cross-disciplinarity, innovation, participation, and openness.

## PROPOSED VALUES

Drawing from manifestos, model statements of value, and my own analysis of the rhetoric of the digital humanities, I propose the following initial list of digital humanities values. My intent is not to speak presumptuously for the community and decide

on my own what it values but rather to open up the conversation. Although I wanted to keep the list of values concise, I recognize that others should probably be added, such as sharing public knowledge, curiosity, multidisciplinary, and balancing theory and practice. With each value, I explain what it is and why it is embraced by the digital humanities community, and I also offer a few examples of how the value manifests itself, aggregating ongoing discussions in the digital humanities. This set of values signifies what the digital humanities community aspires to achieve, not necessarily what it has fully met.

### *Openness*

Openness operates on several levels in the digital humanities, describing a commitment to the open exchange of ideas, the development of open content and software, and transparency (Zorich, 11). The digital humanities community embraces openness because of both self-interest and ethical aspirations. In order to create digital scholarship, researchers typically need access to data, tools, and dissemination platforms. As Christine Borgman argues, “Openness matters for the digital humanities for reasons of interoperability, discovery, usability, and reusability” (Borgman), since it means that scholars are better able to find and use the data they need and create systems that work together. As participants at a 2011 MLA panel on “The Open Professoriate” argued, openness allows scholars to reach larger audiences than the few who read academic journals, meet their responsibilities to be “public servants,” participate in public exchanges, and become more visible (Jaschik). Ultimately, openness promotes the larger goal of the humanities “to democratize knowledge to reach out to ‘publics,’ share academic discoveries, and invite an array of audiences to participate in knowledge production” (Draxler et al.).

We can see openness at work throughout the digital humanities community, such as in open-source software tools, freely accessible digital collections, and open-access journals and books. In the United States, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) “strongly encourages” grant applicants to release software developed through NEH support as open source (National Endowment for the Humanities). The digital humanities community has produced a number of open-source tools, including Zotero and NINES Collex. Likewise, some digital collections important to the digital humanities, such as the Rossetti Archive, use Creative Commons licenses; even more make their content freely accessible without explicitly using such open licenses. In launching *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, the editors decided to make it open access to expand the audience and connect with fields related to the digital humanities, so that “it can offer a freely accessible view of the field to those who are curious about it, and can also provide a publication venue that is visible to readers (and potential authors) from these other domains” (Flanders, Piez, and Terras). Openness thus supports related values such as transdisciplinarity, collaboration, and the democratization of knowledge.

Digital humanists are beginning to press for open access not only to digital collections, tools, and scholarship but also to educational resources and even course evaluations. As Ethan Watrall argues, open courseware benefits the global community of learners by making knowledge widely available (and is thus "the right thing to do"), the university by making visible its curriculum and offering educational resources for current students, and faculty members by documenting their educational innovations and giving them access to the pedagogical contributions of their colleagues. As part of his commitment to openness and transparency, Mark Sample makes his course evaluations public and shares his Zotero library ("Transparency, Teaching, and Taking My Evaluations Public"). As Sample argues, the work of the humanities "is so crucial that we need to share what we learn, every step along the way" ("On Hacking and Unpacking My (Zotero) Library"). Rather than cheapening knowledge by making it free, embracing openness recognizes the importance of the humanities to society.

### *Collaboration*

As Steven Johnson argues, a "majority of breakthrough ideas emerge in collaborative environments" as the free flow of information allows people to build on ideas and think in new ways. If reforming education and solving social problems depends on tapping our "collective creative potential," then the humanities faces a "real ethical dilemma in its persistent [sic] presumption that intellectual work is fundamentally individual," argues Alex Reid. Thus one of the key contributions that the digital humanities can make is "to encourage a new kind of communal behavior, guided by a new *ethos*" (Reid).

Indeed, the digital humanities community promotes an ethos that embraces collaboration as essential to its work and mission (even as it recognizes that some work is better done in solitude). In part, that emphasis on collaboration reflects the need for people with a range of skills to contribute to digital scholarship. As Martha Nell Smith explains, "By its very nature, humanities computing demands new models of work, specifically those that exploit the technology of collaboration, for humanities computing projects cannot be realized without project managers, text encoders, scanners, visionaries, and others with a variety of responsibilities to produce effective multimedia projects." Often collaborations in the digital humanities are interdisciplinary, linking together the humanistic and computational approaches (Siemens, Unsworth, and Schreibman). Yet collaboration isn't just about being more productive but also about transforming how the humanities work. Instead of working on a project alone, a digital humanist will typically participate as part of a team, learning from others and contributing to an ongoing dialogue. By bringing together people with diverse expertise, collaboration opens up new approaches to tackling a problem, as statistical computing is applied to the study of literature or geospatial tools are used to understand historical data.

There are many indicators of the importance of collaboration to the digital humanities community. Consider, for instance, how frequently “collaboration” is a topic at digital humanities conferences. For instance, at the Digital Humanities 2010 Conference, a number of papers, posters, and workshop sessions addressed collaboration, whether as a key component of the humanities cyberinfrastructure (e.g., “Content, Compliance, Collaboration and Complexity: Creating and Sustaining Information”), a goal for online environments (e.g., “Developing a Collaborative Online Environment for History—The Experience of British History Online”), a characteristic of the digital humanities community (e.g., “A Tale of Two Cities: Implications of the Similarities and Differences in Collaborative Approaches within the Digital Libraries and Digital Humanities Communities”), or a means of accomplishing work (e.g., “An Inter-Disciplinary Approach to Web Programming: A Collaboration Between the University Archives and the Department of Computer Science”) (Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations, *Digital Humanities 2010 Conference Abstracts*). In my own preliminary analysis of collaboration in the digital humanities community, I found that, between 2004 and 2008, 48 percent of the articles published in *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, a major DH journal, were coauthored, a much higher percentage than is typical of humanities journals (Spiro). Digital humanities centers (such as the Collaboratory for Research in Computing for Humanities) strive to support collaborations (Zorich), as do digital humanities networks such as the Humanities Arts, Sciences, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC), a focus sometimes reflected in their names. Many digital humanities funding programs explicitly require or encourage collaboration, including the NEH’s Collaborative Research Grants, Digging into Data Challenge, JISC/NEH Transatlantic Digitization Collaboration Grants, and DFG/NEH joint grants.

But it isn’t just that the digital humanities community values collaboration—rather, it values collaboration that acknowledges contributions by all involved, whether they are tenured faculty, graduate students, technologists, or librarians (Nowviskie). To guide the DH community in collaborating with respect and fairness for all, the “Collaborators’ Bill of Rights” affirms the community value of recognizing all involved in a collaboration and outlines how credit should be attributed and intellectual property rights of contributors respected (Kirschenbaum et al.).

### *Collegiality and Connectedness*

As part of its commitment to openness and collaboration, the digital humanities community promotes collegiality, welcoming contributions and offering help to those who need it. Tom Scheinfeldt calls this the “niceness” of digital humanities, which he ascribes to both its collaborative nature and its focus on method rather than theory (“Why Digital Humanities is ‘Nice’”). Furthermore, as Lincoln Mullen argues, inclusion may be an effective strategy for increasing the acceptance of digital scholarship: “It’s the ethos that says, I’m a coder and you’re not, so let me

teach you, or let me build the tools you need. It's the ethos that says texts and tools should be available for all and that publicly funded research and instruction should be publicly accessible" (Mullen). If the underlying goal is the promotion of public knowledge, why not share?

We can see this commitment to collegiality in both virtual and physical spaces that bring together digital humanists. For example, *Digital Humanities Questions and Answers*<sup>1</sup> aims to "create a friendly and inviting space where people can help each other with questions about languages, tools, standards, best practices, pedagogy, and all things related to scholarly activity in the digital humanities (broadly defined)" (Meloni). Between September of 2010 and April 2011, *Digital Humanities Questions and Answers* has attracted over one thousand posts, attesting to the willingness of the DH community to help. Likewise, THATCamp, an "unconference" that promotes collaboration and conversation in the digital humanities, aims to be "open, . . . informal," and "non-hierarchical and non-disciplinary and inter-professional" (French). Rather than establishing an agenda in advance, THATCamps encourage participants to write short blog posts before the unconference to describe their session ideas, then charge the participants with defining the schedule during the first session. At a typical THATCamp, it doesn't matter whether you are a senior faculty member, a graduate student, a programmer, or an early career librarian; what matters is your willingness to participate and the quality of your ideas. With the participants in charge of defining the conference, sometimes individuals can dominate the discussion, and some conversations can be less inclusive than others, but the ethic of THATCamp emphasizes collaboration, productivity, and fun (French).

Recently, this idea of inclusiveness in the digital humanities has come under critique. For example, William Pannapacker noted the split between "builders and theorizers" and "an in-group, out-group dynamic" in the digital humanities ("Digital Humanities Triumphant?"), a comment echoed by others (Sulley). But as Stéfan Sinclair suggests, the digital humanities community recognizes a variety of contributions, from authoring publications to moderating discussion lists to developing software. Many of its members devote themselves to serving the community—"advocating for the digital humanities at various levels, helping to provide support and expertise for other colleagues, mentoring junior colleagues formally and informally" (Sinclair). Still, leaders of the digital humanities community have reacted with concern to the charge of exclusiveness. Geoffrey Rockwell argues for providing more paths to entry to the community, looks to THATCamp as a model for "creating a new 'we' of community," and concludes, "May we have the grace to welcome the exuberance of passion of the next generation." Likewise, John Unsworth suggests that "to expand the community further," digital humanities will need to demonstrate how it can advance humanities research, provide support for researchers and teachers who want to use digital tools and methods, and reward their efforts ("The State of Digital Humanities, 2010"). Even

if the DH community has not fully met the value of collegiality and inclusiveness, it certainly aspires to.

### *Diversity*

The digital humanities embraces diversity, recognizing that the community is more vibrant, discussions are richer, and projects are stronger if multiple perspectives are represented. Some argue that the digital humanities community pays lip service to diversity but has not engaged with it on a deeper level. As Tanner Higgin contends, “issues of cultural politics are downplayed or, more commonly, considered a given within DH. There’s a disposition that the battles of race, gender, class and ecology have already been won, their lessons have been learned, and by espousing a rhetoric of equity everything will fall into place” (Higgin). Similarly, Anne Cong-Huyen asks, “where are those individuals and communities who are visibly different to examine and create or represent disparate voices and media objects?”

Given the DH community’s orientation toward building and making rather than theorizing, its focus has not really been on cultural politics, although Alan Liu and others have been pressing it to engage with cultural criticism (Liu). Based on my admittedly anecdotal observations at DH gatherings, the community may not have achieved the same degree of diversity in race and ethnicity as it has in professional roles, nationalities, age, disciplines, and gender. However, the community works toward diversity as a goal. In recognition of the need for the digital humanities to be diverse, THATCamp SoCal created a position statement, “Towards an Open Digital Humanities”: “Digital humanities must take active strides to include all the areas of study that comprise the humanities and must strive to include participants of diverse age, generation, skill, race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, nationality, culture, discipline, areas of interest. Without open participation and broad outreach, the digital humanities movement limits its capacity for critical engagement” (Rivera Monclova). The community’s desire to achieve diversity and inclusiveness is reflected in the theme of the 2011 Digital Humanities conference, “Big Tent Digital Humanities” (Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations, “General CFP”). The call for papers for the conference includes “digital humanities and diversity” as a suggested topic, reflecting both the importance given to the topic and the sense that it merits deeper discussion.

### *Experimentation*

The language of experimentation runs throughout the digital humanities, demonstrating its support of risk taking, entrepreneurship, and innovation. By leveraging information technology to explore data, digital humanities casts intellectual problems as experiments: What is the effect of modeling the data in a particular way? What happens when we visualize data or use text mining tools to discover patterns in it? (Svensson, “The Landscape of Digital Humanities”). As Willard McCarty suggests, “ours is an experimental practice, using equipment and instantiating definite



methods." As in the sciences, digital humanities projects often use data, tools, and methods to examine particular questions, but the work supports interpretation and exploration. The word "experiment" turns up in Burrows's *Computation into Criticism: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels and an Experiment in Method*, which explores the use of textual analysis software to study Austen's language. Likewise, Ayers and Thomas initially included the word "experiment"—*Two American Communities on the Eve of the Civil War: An Experiment in Form and Analysis* (Ayers and Thomas)—in the title of their article for *The American Historical Review*, which tests how historians can "create or present new forms of scholarship and narrative" (Thomas, 415). However, reviewers rejected the article's use of hypertext, since it "frustrated readers' expectations for a scholarly article laid out in a certain way" (Ayers, "The Academic Culture and the IT Culture"). When Ayers and Thomas's article was finally published in the journal, it adopted a "much-simplified form" and took a new title that deemphasized its experimental approach: "The Differences Slavery Made: A Close Analysis of Two American Communities" (Ayers, "The Academic Culture and the IT Culture"). Perhaps a traditional academic journal wasn't ready for "an experiment in form and analysis" (although the language of experimentation still permeates the article).

Not all experiments succeed as originally imagined, but the digital humanities community recognizes the value of failure in the pursuit of innovation. "[T]o encourage innovations in the digital humanities," the National Endowment for the Humanities offers "Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants," which "are modeled, in part, on the 'high risk/high reward' paradigm often used by funding agencies in the sciences" (National Endowment for the Humanities). Failure is accepted as a useful result in the digital humanities, since it indicates that the experiment was likely high risk and means that we collectively learn from failure rather than reproducing it (assuming that the failure is documented). As John Unsworth argues, "If an electronic scholarly project can't fail and doesn't produce new ignorance, then it isn't worth a damn" ("Documenting the Reinvention of Text").

Many digital humanities organizations model themselves after laboratories, emphasizing the experimental, collaborative nature of their work. In defining the term "digital humanities center," Diane Zorich characterizes it as "an entity where new media and technologies are used for humanities-based research, teaching, and intellectual engagement and experimentation" (4). Indeed, a number of DH centers position themselves as labs, including the University of Virginia's Scholars' Lab, the HUMlab at Umeå University, and University of California Davis's Humanities Innovation Lab, reflecting the sense of a lab both as a space where experiments are carried out and as a community focused on exploration and experimentation. Likewise, the Stanford Literary Lab focuses on quantitative methods to study literature, where "[i]deally, research will take the form of a genuine 'experiment'" ("Stanford Literary Lab"). Stanford Literary Lab's recent investigation into automatically classifying



texts by genre, *Quantitative Formalism: An Experiment* (Allison et al.), employs the language of experimentation throughout.

For the digital humanities community, experimentation suggests not only a method of testing ideas and creating knowledge but also its engagement in transforming traditional approaches to teaching and research. “Experiment” belongs in a constellation of terms such as curiosity, play, exploration, and do-it-yourself. Dan Cohen ran an experiment to see if he could disseminate a historical puzzle via Twitter and get an answer back from the research community (Cohen). Similarly, in launching *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, the editors characterize it as an experiment “in how academic journals are published,” given its use of open standards such as XML and commitment to “the rhetoric of digital authoring” (Flanders, Piez, and Terras). Experimentation goes on in the classroom as well as in research and publishing. For instance, the *Looking for Whitman* project brought together classes at four different universities to explore the work of Walt Whitman, collaborate using social networking technologies, and contribute to an open repository of resources from places where Whitman once lived (“About Looking for Whitman”). Jim Groom characterizes *Looking for Whitman* as “an attempt to experiment with how [a group] of distributed faculty and students can share, collaborate, and converse out in the open” (Groom). “Experiment” thus suggests the aim to develop innovative, novel practices for humanities research and teaching.

## Conclusion

To some extent, some digital humanities values may clash with the norms of the academy. For example, universities’ intellectual property policies may be unfavorable toward producing open-source software. In addition, professors may find it difficult to find publishers for their work if they initially release it as open access (although some publishers—including the University of Minnesota Press, which is publishing this volume—are willing to adopt open licenses). Likewise, many humanities departments favor solo work in their tenure and promotion policies and may find it difficult to determine how to assign credit for collaborative work (Modern Language Association, *Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion*). This resistance (or, in some cases, ignorance) makes it all the more important for the DH community to come together in putting forward values such as openness and collaboration. These values point to an overarching ethos that promotes innovative scholarship as a public good and believes that it should be practiced openly and collaboratively.

By developing a core values statement, the digital humanities community can craft a more coherent identity, use these values as guiding principles, and pass them on as part of DH education. What defines a profession is not only what it does but also what values it upholds and how it practices “professional responsibility” (Fuller and Keim). If groups share common values, they are typically governed more

effectively and can motivate people to participate more actively (Zhu, Kraut, and Kittur). As Patrick Svensson notes, the DH community offers "rather strong support for expanding the territory and for achieving a higher degree of penetration" across the humanities community ("Humanities Computing as Digital Humanities"); one way to reach out is to articulate core values that those both inside and outside the community might understand and embrace. Of course, these values must operate in a specific context, where they may clash or get complicated. But they can help to guide decision making about priorities and serve as the basis for the DH community's goals. Should projects use proprietary code? What should DH curricula emphasize? What should determine the agenda of a DH center or professional organization? In tackling these questions, we can draw guidance from an explicit yet evolving set of community values.

## NOTES

This essay elaborates ideas that I first articulated in "What Is She Doing Here? Crafting a Professional Identity as a Digital Humanist/Librarian," in *Alt-Academy: Alternative Academic Careers for Humanities Scholars*, edited by Bethany Nowviskie. Thanks to Liz Losh, Matt Gold, George Williams, and Rebecca Frost Davis for their helpful comments on this essay.

1. <http://digitalhumanities.org/answers>.

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