

**Preserving Context: A Senior Project Proposal
for Hybrid Curation Exhibits and Archival Workflow**

Kate Folkenroth
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Introduction

All over the world, information and communication are becoming more digitized. There is still a need for traditional disseminations of information such as posters and displays, however the rise of technology has only continued to play a larger role in our day-to-day discourse. At the forefront of the scholarly approach to this is the field of digital humanities. According to Digital Humanities Quarterly, an open-access peer-reviewed digital journal, "Digital humanities is a diverse and still emerging field that encompasses the practice of humanities research in and through information technology, and the exploration of how the humanities may evolve through their engagement with technology, media, and computational methods" (2021). This is one of many definitions created to describe digital humanities as a field of study. Common in many definitions is the highlight of the use of technology to communicate information gathered from the methods of the humanities. Most importantly, for the conceptualization of projects in the realm of digital humanities, is the respect of it being a newer interdisciplinary and only partially charted frontier.

A specialization within the field of digital humanities is on curation. Analog curation is the traditional method before the use of digital technologies to catalog, archive, and preserve objects, items, or other works. This is seen as the placards and common physical displays in museums but also seen as archives and libraries with labels on the objects stored and protected in collections. Digital curation is then seen as a similar process but with digital data, information, storage, and display. Digital humanities plays the important role of providing an interdisciplinary framework for collaboration in this process while digital curation acts as a tool for long-term preservation and access to necessary resources (Sabharwal, 2015, p. 12). This relationship allows for innovative work as these practices of curation are documented, combined and improved upon. The combination of analog and digital curation is now often referred to as hybrid curation.

Digital Humanities is also known as being project-based and a field of practice. These concepts from the field need to be applied to a project to be demonstrated and analyzed. For this, I am applying the concept of hybrid curation to an item gifted to Allegheny College: an Indonesian bis pole sculpture. This object is a tall cylindrical wood carving featuring white pigments from Indonesian created post-1981 (Bocchi, n.d.). This resembles the art and wood carving style of the Asmat ritual bis poles. These were traditionally used in their cultural death rituals with important ties to Asmat religious practices (Dobratz, 2008). Since this piece does not

feature some key characteristics of his poles and is large yet without signs of external display, this piece has been determined to be an "art-for-export" work likely purchased in Jakarta in the early 1990s. The information already gathered has allowed for the beginning conceptualization of this project. However, more research will need to be completed to create a display for the object on Allegheny's campus.

This composition is still important to the field of global health, though this is not traditionally connected to physical health. Information preservation and dissemination are vital in society for education and improvement. This data is also qualitative which is not often reused due to epistemological differences (Karcher et al., 2021). With distrust in our ability to reuse qualitative data, the study of global health is not optimizing its use of resources, which are so often scarce. This methodology will hopefully start our ability to promote data reuse and sharing. In its interdisciplinary nature, interlinking of sources across disciplines is especially important for global health as we attempt to change perspectives on global issues related to health. This item will be looked at with an interdisciplinary lense to make a well-rounded exhibit featuring economic, religious, societal, and environmental effects on the wellbeing of those who made the item. This project is not entirely focused on the item. When making an educational display about an item, the effects of making an unethical display harm the wellbeing, especially mental and social, of those who have connection to the item. This has most often been seen with already vulnerable populations and minorities such as indigenous groups. The mediation of curators such as myself with training in global health will not only be looking for how the item itself relates to health but will also strive to improve the methodology we use to cause no harm, now or for future consumers of this exhibit.

Literature Review

Long-term data preservation has been a growing topic of interest throughout the many disciplines. From natural sciences to social sciences to humanities, data is a vital part of the research and work associated with these fields. Curation has been a common type of long-term preservation for items, physical or digital, experiencing some new changes and innovation as technology and needs evolve with time. While traditional analog and digital methods are still being utilized, hybrid curation has been the approach to achieve a harmony between the two and reach the broadest audiences. As this evolution becomes more digital and applied to the fields of

the humanities, new disciplines have emerged, even explicitly called digital humanities. This information guided a larger search for literature on the matter. Starting the search was the decision of what database or service to use. Due to the very interdisciplinary nature of the field, Allegheny College's Pelletier AggreGator was chosen to conduct the search. The keywords entered were "long term data preservation AND hybrid curation AND digital humanities AND (informatics OR anthropology)" to reach the desired articles that featured ethics, anthropology and computer science discourse. Finally, the filter of "scholarly and peer reviewed" as well as the limit to publications in the last ten years narrowed the search to 74 articles that were combed through to conduct this literature review. Many of the sources I found only address digital curation as hybrid curation literature is much less common. The added complexity of modern technology has become an important conversation but does not act solely apart from traditional curation. This addition of digital is what separates hybrid curation from other curation methods. With these available sources, I hope to determine the distinguishing characteristics of hybrid curation as a type of long-term data preservation from the perspective of digital humanists.

Though these have been briefly introduced, many terms like data, information lifecycle, archive, and digital curation have carried many definitions as they have been moved through different fields of study. There has been an exploration of how digital curation has become its own mature discipline that overarches information science (Higgins, 2018). This origin of digital curation growing into what they deem a "sub-meta-discipline" creates interesting dynamics with other disciplines as it "transcends and influences all of [the information science] disciplines and sub-discipline" (Higgins, 2018, pp. 1332). This difficulty is even discussed by Grant in his paper about research data management (2017). She explains how there is a severe lack of distinction between digital curation, data curation, and research data management to such an extent that in discussions on practices, digital collection may include analog material. This highlights the same difficulty of the literature found in this review as many of these just refer to hybrid or mixed materials as a part of digital curation.

As curation as its own discipline continues to be nailed down, definitions and theories are still being developed for curation. Seen as a process, digital curation is the user's interactions with the structure of the digital archive (Davis, 2017). From the perspective of library and information science, this work is seen within the many associated skills and roles of data science (Virkus & Garoufallou, 2019). In the nine roles proposed, three roles completely overlap the

discussion of what curation is in the digital humanities. These roles include data manager, data librarian, and data steward/curator. This sectioning in data science further proves the need to not be restrictive on the terminology of what hybrid curation is in publications. This forces us to rely on the vague definition of curators working on ways to disseminate information to users through mediums, physical or digital.

While there are many labels and descriptions of the job as curators, the most important part discussed in the literature is the added meaning to information through selection and organization. When implementing curation in the classroom, Sheffer and Hunker wanted to show how knowledge of a subject is shaped by particular contexts and framing (2019). They found that their student had firsthand experience through this project to connect sources together for new interpretations and present them in their exhibits. Forkosh Baruch and Gadot, in their paper, also looked at curation's role in education as they attempted to characterize the curation activity of teachers. As they were describing what curation is, they wrote "The curation process produces snippets of knowledge that are connected into meaningful content, thereby examining a topic from diverse perspectives, using various resources" (Forkosh Baruch & Gadot, 2021). This connection that they describe is the added value that curation does, that is echoed throughout the literature that makes it worthy of its own discipline and discourse. Some have been going as far to ask for curation work to be held with the same value of text-heavy publications of conventional scholars (Siddiqui, 2015) which is an important acknowledgement of this value even though the material that is being organized is not the curators' original research.

One difficulty about curation is this core concept of intermediation. There is a strong argument for disintermediation (Sabharwal, 2017) where the public is in charge of its own memory and history. This also fits with the view of seeing data as a commodity that should be free and open access, available for anyone to look at and interpret meaning on their own (Mauther & Parry, 2013). Many issues arise with this as minorities may be systematically erased in the larger social narrative. This issue may still occur or persist with mediation from an unethical curator. This has brought forward the concept of slow archives (Christen & Anderson, 2019) as a solution. These archives aren't slow in the sense of temporality but rather with intention to be done ethically with focus on quality rather than quantity or rapidness. This push is for curators to work with the public to create the archive and have a recursive archival workflow to start working towards decolonized curation. This has even been implemented as indigenous

groups have worked with curators to preserve their information. Though this discussion is worthy of having a full composition, the knowledge organization is worthy to note as it distinguishes curation from other methods. Knowledge organization can reinforce semantic frameworks (Sabharwal, 2021) through metadata. For example, this can promote English over the original language of information as the metadata is often standardized in the curators' language which sustains the hierarchies of collection. This has led to solutions like parallel metadata and other innovative approaches. These issues that arise from adding meaning through organization are what distinguishes curation from other methods.

Focusing on the purpose of using curation, the literature combined concepts of use, reuse, and sharing of data. Improvements are constantly being suggested, but these highlight the main characteristics of curation. Kärberg highlights the use of pre-ingest activities for curation (2013). With intention being at the focus of the curation, the steps following these activities are more likely to be of higher quality. Their work also showed how it was possible to reuse other metadata systems to improve the quality of archive descriptions. Along with improving the quality of the data that is there for use is the usability of display structure to reach and display the information. Often hybrid approaches are cited (McCarthy et al., 2015) as the best way to increase usability. By merging two known ways of how to access the information, a larger audience has more access to information available. These ideas of quality and access are essential to the curators' job.

From the difficulties of curation arises the importance of collaboration, especially with interdisciplinary teams. A solution to the epistemological difficulties of reusing qualitative data has been collaborative curation practices (Karcher et al., 2021). This collaboration, along with data management practices and technological advances, allow for more context and ensure ethical sharing of information so that it may be possible to reuse this information. In 2013, Poole discussed this future of sharing as well and reinforced the need for collaboration and cooperation. This in itself is what Poole cites as the key to long-term sustainability of information. This is echoed by Post and Chassanoff as they highlight that keeping tensions between local and professional contexts at the forefront of curation work is necessary for sustaining archival infrastructure long-term (2021).

Collaboration is not just a solution nor unique to curation, but a vital part of distinguishing this methodology from other information science disciplines. As Anderson and

Blake followed the digital evolution of science disciplines and now the humanities, they iterated the importance of collaboration. They compared the definitions of e-Science and "At their core is the idea of collaboration and sharing between and across communities – whether sharing research data, compute power or other resources– in order to enable new forms of enquiry, and the generation and understanding of new research questions" (Anderson & Blanke, 2012). This identification of collaborative work in e-Science was seen again in all of the examples as anthropologists and computer scientists are collaborating to complete new digital humanities projects. The digital humanities inquiry in itself is based on the collaboration model (Maryl et al., 2020). To promote this methodology, in their piece, Mauther and Parry focus on the policies that help facilitate researchers to curate their work (2013). They found that some of the most successful attempts to facilitate archives were between the collaboration of the researcher and some entity that specializes in curation, like an organization, team, or single curator. By working together, this process happens more often and more ethically.

This distinguishing factor of collaboration is helpful as it highlights the necessity of having multiple perspectives on the same archive or project. Uniting these varying practices and specialties can create new innovative standards to improve the ethics of collection. There is no set practice in the work to follow or even review projects for their ethicality but there is still the question of the quality of an archive.

After the completion of curation work, one difficulty derived from the nature of the project is how to measure its success. While other fields may have more obvious ways to measure the success of their work, curation lacks specific standards to judge their success. Abrams attempts to capture this in four categories for evaluating the success of digital preservation (2021). These four categories are accessibility, integrity, authenticity, and usability. This reflects many of the distinguishing factors of digital curation. Integrity and authenticity show the responsibilities of the curator(s) to be transparent and construct a trustworthy workflow. This transparency can also help reduce future replication crises (Slingerland et al., 2020) that may occur in many fields. Integrating transparency by documenting an archival workflow can improve the reproducibility and sustainability of archives. Accessibility and usability reflect the use, reuse, and sharing of the work. As this focuses on the experience of the user and quantifying these categories for measuring success, it also summarizes the important characteristics of curation work.

With these factors in mind, this methodology is based on much of the main concerns that arise with mediation. The social responsibility of curators is intertwined with their occupational responsibilities to collect, store, and display quality information that is accessible and usable. Collaboration and awareness of how to ensure the quality of the archive will be important considerations to highlight in the reflexive practices of curation. After parsing through these themes from the literature, it will be worthwhile to look specifically at projects that have already been created that can model or guide this project's use of technology or tools. These sources will act as "seed articles" for this next literature review as many projects were cited to explain these distinguishing characteristics of curation.

Research Question

How can the methods of hybrid curation be applied to items donated to Allegheny College?

Project Aims

My project's primary goal is to create an ethical, educational, and culturally appropriate hybrid exhibit for the Indonesian bis pole installation. This will be accomplished by completing several smaller goals before achieving this final construct.

First, I hope to attain an understanding of the current tools and techniques used for long-term data preservation and hybrid curation. Second, I hope to create a framework of archival workflow for Allegheny College. This will be focused on ethical displays in public spaces for educational purposes which can be conducted to create the exhibit for installation.

With the completion of these pieces, this project will catalog this artifact while creating an accessible digital archive and analog exhibit.

Expected Final Product

The final product of this project will be seen in three parts: a literature review, an exhibition, and a final reflective composition. The literature review will focus on the current practices and uses of hybrid curation. This knowledge will then be applied as the methodology to create a hybrid exhibit for the donated Indonesian bis pole. Lastly, the final composition will surmise the process and application of hybrid curation while reflecting on the implications of this

work in the fields of Global Health and Informatics. Due to the nature of this project, the analog exhibition will be displayed publicly on the campus of Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania. The digital display of this exhibit will be featured through the institution's web services and may be accessed publicly through the internet or through the QR codes that will be displayed on placards in the physical exhibition.

Methods

Due to the construction of this project, slightly different methods will be engaged to achieve my proposed aims. The project will begin with a literature review building on the preliminary literature review that was conducted for this proposal. The second portion will utilize the knowledge gained from the literature review to utilize the methodology of hybrid curation to create an ethical archival workflow for Allegheny College's specific infrastructure. The final reflective documentation will detail the process of using these methods, elaborate on ethical considerations, and discuss the implications of this work.

This literature review part of my work has two distinct parts. The preliminary literature review was focused on the distinguishing characteristics of hybrid curation work in the digital humanities as a form of long-term data preservation. From this search, many specific projects, tools, and services were cited in the descriptions of these scholarly articles. The first step following this work will be to conduct a literature review on these projects, objectives, and tools that resemble the item and exhibit that resemble the expected final product. This structure follows similar literature review methodology as conducted by Grant with his review of data management perspectives (2017). Inspired by her work, I also found the need to start with a phase of definitions and distinguishing characteristics followed by another phase focused on how this new field functions in practice. This leads this second phase to focus on what is currently being used for hybrid curation as an anthropological, digital humanist tool.

After completing this literature review, I will take these findings and apply them to the creation of the bis pole exhibit. This will be the main focus of my project as it is enacting the hybrid curation methodology.

An important decision that has been made is to do hybrid rather than just digital curation. While digital curation is sufficient to achieve the goal of long-term data preservation, it does not consider the needs of the current functioning culture on Allegheny College's campus. This gifted

item is a physical object and will be displayed in a public location on the campus. A physical installation with placards for the object has already been determined as part of the final product. Often scholarly practices still include both analog and digital methods and work today when engaging with archives and research (Maryl et al., 2020). The technology and digital archives are seen as an addition to current methods to add different ways of access and preservation to enrich information past what can be done with only analog methods (Sabharwal, 2021; Sheffer & Hunker, 2019; Siddiqui, 2015). This reasoning further advances the necessity to complete this project with hybrid curation rather than just digital.

One of the ways to add meaning to the archive is the ability to reorganize and link data, whose capacities only increase with the digital format. This work for the hybrid display will require organizing and connecting this display to information about bis poles. I will be likely displaying this information in a website framework with influence from the technology services discovered in the literature review. I plan to begin organizing the information by using Global Health dimensions to guide the organization of the subsections such as the economic background of these wooden sculptures being art-for-export. This has the flexibility to adjust as I discover what information is available for this piece.

With replication and sustainability in mind, a template or bare framework will likely be created to guide future curation work. The creation of this template should allow for quick and relatively easy input of information to create a functional, accessible, and enriching digital archive. My work of adding the additional sections will act as a guide for future curation that can build upon the basic template. Overall, this application of hybrid curation will act as a model for an ethical archival workflow that can be reused or even improved upon with future iterations.

Lastly, documentation and reflection are important with this work. After finishing the display, I will need to formalize my notes and experiences of the application process into a reusable and understandable workflow. This will only be feasible, logistically, with work integrated into all parts of the project with extra dedicated time towards the conclusion.

As curators continue to decolonize their practices by adding time for reflexivity (Christen & Anderson, 2019), I will add this time throughout my process but dedicate this last third of my work to reflexivity. The documentation should and will include conversations and thought processes around actively incorporating ethics considering other implications of this work. This work will function with disintermediation (Sabharwal, 2017) which is one of the large

conversations occurring amongst curators and other digital humanists. Other considerations such as representation and power will be heavily considered as well as this display is out of the context of the culture and society it is representing and created by curators.

These ethical considerations lead into how to measure the success of the exhibit. This construct of success cannot be directly or indirectly observed. Abrams (2021) suggests from their research that we can use the proxies of accessibility, integrity, authenticity, and usability to gauge the success of an archive. This will lead me to interdisciplinary collaboration as we work through these questions of how to successfully use digital tools for a functional final product while conveying the integrity of the exhibit as I act in the role of curator.

Global Health Context

Global Health Studies is an interdisciplinary field that can be split into four distinct dimensions: science and the environment, power and economics, ethics and social responsibility, and culture and society. In the reflection of my project, there are two foci as I contextualize my work in the field of Global Health Studies. First, I highlight the implications of the hybrid curation methodology. Second, I focus on the object of curation, the bis pole, which has its own history, narrative, and implications in each of these dimensions.

Hybrid Curation

With the lens of digital humanities, I will be working mostly with the science seen in the field of computer science. I will be working with architecture code and software to create a website exhibit as the digital footprint for the Indonesian bis pole display. This will feature many concepts of web development to create a structure that is ADA compliant and easily replicable. Looking at larger contexts, this framework can be repeated and applied to many different objects at Allegheny. With even broader contexts, this use of a hybrid approach for disseminating information can add to the conversation in health communication. The pairing of computer science skills with the work in Global Health, anthropology and other traditionally analog methods can allow for innovative approaches to broadcast information for larger audiences.

Another concept central to this project is power relations in curation and the creation of exhibits. Curation and displays of objects can be made for the preservation of culture but are sometimes not made by representatives of the culture. It is vital to recognize the positionality of

the creator of the display as well as who is featured, able to speak, or considered an expert. These concepts of power are dynamic and often unclear of who is to be ignored and left out of the narrative created by the exhibits. The history of collection is deeply rooted in colonialism as it creates power hierarchies that can allow for authorial control and erasure (Christen & Anderson, 2019). As erasure of culture is to one extreme of unethical curation, these power relations are important to recognize in the misrepresentation and treatment of others. This lack of acknowledgements degrades the healthcare of those from minorities as the majority overtakes the health narrative. Diverse representations allow for knowledge circulation that can improve the equity of treatment and policies.

Thirdly, this proposed exhibit is created to be ethical. An ethical display is difficult to navigate with many questions that need to be asked recursively. Such questions include "What data/information should be collected, presented, stored, or preserved?", "Is there more value being placed on certain voices over others?", "How and where should objects be displayed or should they be returned?" These questions are important as items and information is traded globally. The harm of unethical displays can be seen in the consequences of stigmatization, emotional and mental health degradation, lawsuits, or demonstrations of violence. This social responsibility of curators is seen in the data collecting, storing, and sharing of trustworthy information in sustainable ways for reuse. Without curators acting in the best interest of society as a whole, the work completed is unlikely to be ethical, reusable, or sustainable and potentially cause harm such as culture erasure.

As curation is based around information and objects, curation often is working with cultures and society. Objects and information are representative of the cultures or society that they originate from. As mentioned in the introduction, the exhibits and preservation can affect the social and mental wellbeing of those who are intertwined with the object. Long-term preservation not only preserves the items but the context and surrounding culture. With the mediation of curators, these contexts may be presented through a singular specific perspective. Curation can harm or misrepresent those it is attempting to preserve if completed without respect or context of the people and cultures. Collaboration, as seen in the literature review, is often the solution as curators should work with experts and even representatives of the culture being preserved or displayed.

Indonesian bis pole

Focused on the ecological and built environment, I will be focused on the materials of the bis pole and their interaction with human health. The wood used in this object is likely Ironwood which has important ties to the economy. The physical properties of the wood allowed for the pigments to not seep into the wood itself. The colors also displayed on the piece were created by the use of white clam shells or clay. These pigments are able to stay on the bis pole without adhesion. The creation of these exports had an effect on the environment and the people themselves. Part of my exhibit will feature details on these materials and their effects on the population interacting with them.

An important feature of this object is that it is an export. This bis pole was created for the purpose of being sold. Being an art-for-export piece also brings to rise the concepts of tourism and resource allocation. This object was made from materials that were not all from one region and furthermore used materials like ironwood that could have been used for other purposes. The economics of the region where this resource was originally made may shed light on the condition and lifestyles of the people in the region. The demographics and job market may also be an important factor of why these pieces were being made for export.

Lastly, this bis pole is from a specific culture, the Asmat culture, and its people. This cultural context is important as I look into who created this object and why. bis poles in the Asmat culture have a long history of being part of tribal death rituals and were used for specific purposes. These people and their culture are represented by this object. This in the larger context brings questions related to material culture and what practices, beliefs, and values we can derive from this piece. Stigmatizations and judgements are often formed from outside the originating community which can be instigated by improper displays of objects outside their original context.

Proposed Timeline

Spring 2022

Date	Due Dates	Expected Progress
Week 5: Feb 21 - 25		Start development of official proposal & collect and read literature for review
Week 6: Feb 28 - Mar 4	<i>Check-in with 1st Readers</i>	Complete first full draft of proposal & collect and read literature for review
Week 7: Mar 7 - 11		Revising draft proposal & collect and read literature for review
Week 8: Mar 14 - 18	<i>Updated Proposal Due: Mar. 18th</i>	Finalize official proposal & collect and read literature for review
<i>Break: Mar 21 - 25</i>	~~~~	~~~~
Week 9: Mar 28 - Apr 1	<i>Meeting with 1st readers</i>	Begin the larger literature review with collected literature
Week 10: Apr 4 - 8		Collect and read literature for review
Week 11: Apr 11 - 15		Write draft of literature review
Week 12: Apr 18 - 22		Finalize draft of literature review
Week 13: Apr 25 - 29		Prepare for digital infrastructure and working through exhibit information
Week 14: May 2 - 6		Work with digital infrastructure and exhibit information
Week 15: May 9 - 13		Work with digital infrastructure and exhibit information
Week 16: May 16 - 20	<i>Progress Report Due: May 20th</i>	Finalize progress report and work with digital infrastructure and exhibit information

Fall 2022

Date	Due Dates	Expected Progress
Week 1: Aug 30 - Sept 2		Finalize Analog and Digital Exhibits
Week 2: Sept 5 - 9	<i>Meeting with 1st readers</i>	Finalize Analog and Digital Exhibits
Week 3: Sept 12 - 16		Review Literature Review and Exhibits
Week 4: Sept 19 - 23		Review Literature Review and Exhibits
Week 5: Sept 26 - 30		Draft official reflection and write-ups
Week 6: Oct 3 - 7		Finalize reflection and write-ups
Week 7: Oct 12 -14 <i>Fall Break</i>		Revise reflection and write-ups
Week 8: Oct 17 - 21		Revise and compile full composition
Week 9: Oct 24 - 28	<i>Final Composition Draft Due: Oct. 28th</i>	Completion of full composition draft
Week 10: Oct 31 - Nov 4		Final revision period
Week 11: Nov 7 - 11		Final revision period
Week 12: Nov 14 - 18	<i>Final Composition Project Due: Nov. 18th</i>	Final submission of complete project
Week 13: Nov 21 - 22 <i>Thanksgiving Break</i>		Prepare for Oral Defense
Week 14: Nov 28 - Dec 2	<i>Oral Defense</i>	Complete Oral Defense

Budget

The estimated budget of this project is \$150 for the exhibition portion of this work. The texts I am using for my literature review are free and publicly available or accessed through the Allegheny library services. The digital space and software for the digital exhibit are already available under the existing Allegheny digital infrastructure. The gifted item will need to be properly displayed, in a location on campus that is currently undetermined, to preserve the materials and colors of the bis pole along with proper installation costs which will not be addressed in this budget. For the budget requested, the entirety will be used for creating appropriate placards for the exhibit of the bis pole. This total will be divided between the material that would allow for appropriate mounting, ensure durability of the display, and demonstrate continuity with existing placards across campus.

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