# **SPIRO — Global**

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# **Global Perspectives on Digital Humanities Expertise**

**Presentations**

### 1. A Global Benchmarking Study of Expertise in Digital Scholarship

Cawthorne, J.

West Virginia University

Lewis, V.

McMaster University

Spiro, L.

Rice University

Wang, X.

University of Cincinnati

There is increasing awareness of the geographical and linguistic diversity of digital humanities (Russell, 2014), but insufficient knowledge of what shape expertise takes around the world. Supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, we conducted a global benchmarking study to understand the skills and competencies necessary for digital scholarship. We interviewed faculty, research staff, administrators, and graduate students at leading digital humanities and digital social science organizations in eight countries/regions, asking about the expertise important to their work, how they acquired this expertise, and how the organization nurtures it. This panel brings together leaders of five organizations that we visited to offer their perspectives on the human dimensions of digital scholarship.

We will begin the panel by giving a 10-minute summary of key findings and lessons learned. Through our site visits, we witnessed different models for supporting digital scholarship, including centers, labs, departments, and networks. We learned that many organizations face common challenges in recruiting and retaining staff and examined strategies for contending with such challenges, including facilitating a community of practice and offering dedicated research time. We hope that our study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the diversity of digital scholarship.

Brief presentations by leaders of DH organizations will provide examples of this diversity. Each DH center leader will give an approximately five-minute talk, raising a few key questions or provocations. The rest of the session will be devoted to discussing these contributions and engaging with questions and comments from the audience.

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### 2. Fellows No More: DH Centers and Post-Project-Centered DH

Fraistat, N.

University of Maryland

The digital humanities center has been a crucial institution for helping humanists develop digital competencies, primarily through offering fellowships for project development. The fellowship/project model, still prevalent in today’s centers, originally was based on the widespread model that humanities centers used so successfully: fellows received a year off from teaching to work on a book project, in return for which they would be resident at the center.

As transferred to DH centers, especially the University of Virginia’s Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities (IATH) in the early 1990s, the ‘fellows model’ was extraordinarily successful and influential. It served well to meet the needs of a historical moment in which the great majority of humanists were uninterested at best and suspicious at worst of digital scholarship. We are now in quite a different moment, when there is widespread interest among humanities faculty and students in developing digital competencies. The fellowship model now constitutes an over-investment in the few at the expense of the many. Rather than developing digital competencies in faculty fellows, it has often resulted in faculty relying almost completely on the competencies of center staff without developing any new ones of their own. This, in turn, leads to all sorts of problems in the life of the project once a fellowship period has ended. I will turn to our experience at the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) to argue that DH centers need to think beyond the ‘fellow’ and the ‘project’ as the best means for developing these competencies, discussing our DH Incubator program as one means of doing so.

### 3. Building Digital Archive Systems for Scholarly Use

Hsiang, J.

National Taiwan University

In 2007, computer scientists founded National Taiwan University’s Research Center for Digital Humanities (RCDH). RCDH focuses on creating archives of Chinese language materials (which pose research challenges) as well as building the system methodology and tools for scholarly use of digital archives. This differs from the model where a humanist brings her problem and data to a DH center and develops solutions with technologists.

Our emphasis on system design grew out of observing humanities scholars’ frustration in using digital archive systems, which are based on the conventional precision/recall model. Since historical research can be construed as a study of contexts, a digital archive system for historians should provide an environment for exploring relationships as well as retrieving documents.

Developing such a methodology required understanding how historians use a digital system. We built a digital archive, observed how historians used it, and developed new features based on their feedback. After two years of iteration, we revised the Taiwan History Digital Library to their liking. Through this process, we developed a new methodology: digital archive systems with context discovery. Using this methodology, we have built 33 digital archive systems that host about 4 million metadata records, 30 million images, and 400 million Chinese words, as well as over 20 tools designed for specific collections. They are widely used by historians working with Chinese materials.

We view a good scholarly digital archive system as an ongoing, close collaboration among system builders, domain experts (in our case, historians and anthropologists), and data curators. RCDH draws its staff mainly from the fields of computer science, library science, geology, history, and anthropology. The ability to work with people from different disciplines is our top priority. We also conduct workshops and provide scholarships to attract young scholars to use our systems and provide feedback.

### 4. Reflections toward Building Collaborative, Methods-Centred Community in the Digital Humanities

Siemens, R.

University of Victoria

Discussion around establishing the Electronic Textual Cultures Lab (ETCL) at the University of Victoria, before I took up its Canada Research Chair in Humanities Computing in 2004, pointed in several directions. One was that U Victoria already had a small research computing support unit. Another was that the fellows model of IATH, MITH, King’s College London, and elsewhere was demonstrating success in building champions of a digital approach to humanities teaching and research as well as internationally significant research interventions. Further, the field was starting to reap considerable benefit from the early investment made by groups at Toronto, Princeton, Oxford, and elsewhere in training institutes, instilling computational skills in local constituents and enabling those from elsewhere to participate. In the context of such considerations, the most important decision we made in establishing ETCL was to view the end of what we were doing not so much as a creating a physical entity as creating something viewed in terms of its function and facilitative potential—including, but beyond, any single physical space.

From that focus away from a physical/institutional imprint flowed many other decisions that have shaped the growth of digital humanities at the University of Victoria. The extant support group continued providing local humanities-specific support, at the same time as ETCL assumed a broader mandate across teaching, research, and service activities, with cross-disciplinary local, regional, national, and international impact understood. Further, the Digital Humanities Summer Institute (DHSI) was embraced locally not only as a venue for on-site training but also as an international meeting point for understanding DH-pertinent tools, techniques, and technologies; our undergraduate minor in DH, joint with computer science, builds on this, as does our recent DHSI-based graduate certificate in DH, offered in partnership with the DH Training Network and beyond. So, too, with projects such as Implementing New Knowledge Environments, a network of researchers at over 20 institutions working with a similar number of invested research partners—having a centre in ETCL, but ultimately comprising spaces across the larger research community. This approach also facilitated embracing more than one physical locus for community- and practice-based work, the most significant being the MakerLab and the shared sense of enterprise between it and ETCL.

My contribution will focus on these elements, and this approach, toward building collaborative, methods-centred community in the digital humanities.

### 5. Digital Humanities Center of Wuhan University

Ma, F.

Wuhan University

The Digital Humanities Center of Wuhan University (DHWU) focuses on knowledge service, knowledge networking, semantic technologies for cultural resources, ontology, semantic publishing, information retrieval, etc. DHWU researchers come from diverse disciplines, including library and information science, computer science, natural language processing, GIS, literature, and art. Most have rich experience in interdisciplinary research. As a virtual research center, DHWU plays a key role in scientific communication. To strengthen researchers’ academic abilities, DHWU holds workshops and seminars in which they can share research achievements and collaboration experience, inspire new ideas, and establish partnerships.

### 6. Digital Humanities as an Academic Department

Spence, P.

King’s College London

Digital humanities has a long tradition at King’s College London, but its evolution from a service centre to a research active unit was formalized in 2001–2002 when it was granted status as an academic department (DDH) within what is now a Faculty of Arts & Humanities. Over the years, DDH has lived through many debates about the best model to facilitate innovative but sustainable engagement between the humanities and digital culture, and the result has been a unit that corresponds more closely to the makeup of sister departments within the Faculty. This includes a stronger emphasis on teaching (DDH operates or co-manages four MA programmes, a PhD programme, and is now launching an undergraduate programme in digital culture), in addition to its historic strengths in performing funded research. This greater diversification has strengthened the department but has also presented challenges in career development, academic progression, and credit. I will explore the opportunities and tensions in the formal academic departmental model from a DH perspective, focusing on how growth can be driven by arts and humanities students’ increasing appetite for a close engagement with digital technology, which is theoretically grounded but also provides hands-on experience, and how this in turns influences the academic fabric necessary to sustain it.

### Reference

Russell, I. G. (2014). Geographical and Linguistic Diversity in the Digital Humanities. *Literary and Linguistic Computing,* 28 March, doi:10.1093/llc/fqu005.