UNL Spring 2023 Digital Humanities Class Reading Responses for the first half of the semester

How are digital humanities spaces structurally limited in achieving the core tenants of collaboration and open access and what are the decentralization efforts in place to address them?

The core tenants of digital humanities outlined in the article are collaboration, experimentation, and open access. These core tenants should be used to guide how digital humanities research spaces are operated and accessed, but there are structural barriers that limit each of these core tenants being enacted. Collaboration is often structurally limited by how digital humanities spaces are funded at universities. Open access is structurally limited by funding needs which necessitate affiliations with the university to access the space. Decentralization efforts to address each of these barriers are important to implement, but it is necessary to acknowledge that the structure of the university system requires centralization to operate these types of spaces.

Collaboration is a key tenant of digital humanities outlined in the article. Collaboration is structurally limited by universities and grants that impose a structure on research spaces in an attempt to ensure the proper allocation of resources. However, in these cases, proper allocation of resources often means allocating resources of time, people, and machines to projects and associated faculty who provide funding for these types of spaces. More simply: those who get the grants, get the resources. This type of operation is in opposition to the goals of collaboration in digital humanities.

Collaboration fosters decentralization by acknowledging the work people in digital humanities lab spaces do. This acknowledgment is different than the assumption that because an individual has these skills and a role in this space, it is their job and they don’t need the credit for it. This type of centralization can help decentralization by softening the hierarchical structure, it helps researchers realize that there is more than one person necessary to accomplish intricate projects in the digital humanities, and allows for collaboration within experimentation.

Open access is another key tenant of digital humanities, with a goal of having a physical digital humanities space that is accessible and useable to the university and to the broader community. Open access is structurally limited similar to collaboration. It is difficult for projects with low funding to obtain priority statuses, as well as community organizations not associated with the university to jump through structural hoops to access the space and resources. The types of people this negatively affects are often junior faculty and graduate students who may hold other minority status roles such as women, immigrants, or people of color. Their structurally limited access to these types of digital humanities limits their ability to accomplish key projects and collaborate with necessary researchers to advance their careers and knowledge. In the university system, this could impact a graduate student's dissertation or a junior faculty's tenure track.

The tenant of open access fosters decentralization of digital humanities spaces by acknowledging and attempting to problem-solve structural barriers to open access. A way open access has been extended to community organizations is by having faculty serve as principal investigators for community projects. This also fosters collaboration between the community and the university.