**ENGL 877 Reading Response 1 by Tina Le**

This Reading Response comes from a course called ENGL 877 Advanced Topics in Digital Humanities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Spring 2023. Each week, we do Reading Responses engaging with ideas from the texts we read that week. This is the first Reading Response, along with a comment I left on a classmate’s Reading Response:

**Instructions for Reading Response 1:**

Please use the chat from today's discussion (Tue, Jan 31) which I emailed to everyone to create a prompt for this week's reading response. Then write your response to the prompt. In what you write, please 1) Include the prompt first (but do not count it as part of the word count), then 2) Provide your response.

Also, after you submit your response, please read one of your colleagues' responses and write a short reply in which you offer some constructive feedback. Please choose an essay upon which no one has yet commented.

Specs

Undergraduates: 400 words + 100 words feedback

Graduates 500 words + 100 words feedback

**Prompt:** How should digital humanities labs be structured and run to be in line with core DH tenets of collaboration, experimentation, and open access?

**Response:**

To foster the core digital humanities tenets of “collaboration, experimentation, and (open) access” (Arnold and Tilton), digital humanities labs should focus on expanding the definition of “digital humanities,” intentionally using language that broadens concepts of authorship and and recognizes more contributions, and proactively invite people to use the lab.

Digital humanities is a broad field—as evidenced by the humorous number of definitions from whatisdigitalhumanities.com—but people who are not familiar with the field might have a narrow assumption of what it entails. For example, when I was an undergraduate at UNL, I assumed that digital humanities focused primarily on literature because the Willa Cather archive and the Walt Whitman archive were prominently displayed. Highlighting a diverse array of projects, especially of underrepresented topics and voices, can help more people feel that they can and want to get involved.

Since digital humanities straddles the line between many different disciplines, all of which have “differing community norms regarding authorship and credit” (Arnold and Tilton), digital humanities labs should explicitly recognize all contributions and value all labor that goes into projects. A small step to work toward this goal is to be mindful of the language we use to name the people involved in digital humanities work. Some academic disciplines prioritize individual leadership, such as by emphasizing “first author” and “principal investigator.” However, that reinforces a hierarchical instead of a collaborative stance. In addition, similar to my earlier point about how people might have a narrow view of “digital humanities,” the terms “author” and “authorship” may also have narrow connotations. As we have discussed in class on Tuesday, using terms such as “contributors” or “creators” can help make space for more people to be involved and recognize important labor that sometimes goes unseen.

Funding is another challenge to consider when trying to foster collaboration, experimentation, and open access. My dream is to overhaul the way that funding works in higher education, and I don’t have easy or practical suggestions for that. However, since we currently operate within institutional funding structures, digital humanities labs should consider how to invite more people in who may not already have access to funding. Arnold and Tilton discuss issues like “faculty-only project grants” that go to “faculty who are considered the prominent researchers on campus.” This mode of funding excludes faculty, students, and community members who are not already established in the field. It also limits the scope of projects, since it might “support a specific research agenda of one or two scholars” (Arnold and Tilton). If digital humanities wants to be more accessible and bring in more perspectives that can lead to experimentation and further collaboration, labs should designate funds to support people who are not already “prominent researchers”—including students and community members who might not be directly tied to a university—to get involved or to dream of new projects. One of my main research interests is community literacy, and a suggestion that I have heard from community members for how to better support university-community collaborations is to open up workshops, professional development sessions, and physical resource spaces for people to learn, experiment with tools and resources that the lab has, and collaborate on new ideas.

**Comment in response to Akua**

Hi Akua,

I appreciate your example of your son’s experience at the Villarreal football academy and how parents pay a $3 attendance fee as another model for thinking about how to fund shared lab spaces. Your point about how those who aren’t able to afford an attendance fee should be able to use the facility free is important to foster accessibility. It reminds me of fitness classes, art classes, and counselors who use a sliding scale system so that finances don’t prevent folks from attending. Like you’ve mentioned, university bureaucracies make it difficult for labs to rely on funding from grants—in addition to the worry of a grant source getting depleted.

A model that your post made me think of is UNL’s Nebraska Innovation Studio makerspace, where “Anyone may become a member of Nebraska Innovation Studio. You have the choice of signing up for a monthly, yearly, or semester membership for UNL participants and monthly or yearly for community members.” While the price might still be high for many people, the fact that a membership for a UNL student is $20/month compared to $50 for UNL faculty/staff can help make the space feel more welcoming for students who might not have grant funding like faculty do.