

Debates in the Digital Humanities

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Where's the Pedagogy? The Role of Teaching and Learning in the Digital Humanities

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he digital humanities (DH) has experienced impressive growth over the past three or four years, sweeping across a number of academic fields and, in the process, helping to reshape and reframe discussion and debate about the nature of scholarly research, peer review and publication, and academic promotion and tenure. "Digital humanities" already generates more than four-hundred thousand unique results in a Google search. The print and online pages of the *Chronicle* of Higher Education, that reliable bellwether of all trends academic, document the impact that the digital humanities has had in and on universities and colleges, both here and abroad. Chronicle, which appears forty-five times a year, has published no fewer than ninety-five articles on DH over the past three years alone, many of which are part of the new and popular ProfHacker blog that Chronicle recently launched to make the publication more relevant to the up-and-coming academic generation. Younger scholars, especially those currently pursuing or having recently received doctoral degrees in fields in the humanities, interpretive social sciences, and the arts, seem particularly taken with the possibilities of using digital innovations and techniques to reimagine their disciplines and the very nature of their future academic work and life.1 The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), a mainstay of financial support for the humanities since its creation in 1965, was well ahead of this particular academic curve, launching its Digital Humanities Initiative in 2006; two years later it evolved into the Office of Digital Humanities.

But this recent rush toward the technological new has tended to focus too narrowly, in my judgment, on the academic research and publication aspects of the digital humanities, in the process reinforcing disciplinary "silos" and traditional academic issues while also minimizing and often obscuring the larger implications of DH for how we teach in universities and colleges and how we prepare the next generation of graduate students for careers inside and outside of the academy. Pedagogy is not totally ignored by DH's growing cadre of practitioners; rather, teaching and

learning are something of an afterthought for many DHers. Matthew Kirschenbaum, the associate director of the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities, in a recent essay on the rise of the digital humanities, emphasizes the research aspects of DH, noting its growing impact on academic scholarship, publishing, peer review, and tenure and promotion in English departments. Kirschenbaum hardly mentions DH's role in teaching and learning until the article's final paragraph, when the word "pedagogy" makes a sudden appearance several times (61). DHers seem far more engaged by the intellectual possibilities of using (to take but one example) digital technologies to mine vast and newly available databases of information on a range of subjects and issues. A good illustration of this focus on digital research can be seen in the various academic research projects spawned by Google's controversial library books scanning project and the heavy publicized Google digital humanities grant competition that encouraged humanities faculty members to use the huge database generated by the company.²

This emphasis on digital research can also be seen in many recent DH academic publications. For example, one of the key DH academic journals, Digital Humanities Quarterly (DHQ), based at Brown University, has published nine online issues since its debut in spring 2007. Its pages feature scholarly work from across the globe representing a mix of humanities disciplines and focusing on a range of interesting DH-related topics. While DHQ's mission statement indicates a desire to "provide a forum for theorists, researchers and teachers to share their work," its actual definition of DH reveals a narrower emphasis on academic research: "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." A search of the titles of the ninety plus articles DHQ has published over its first three years confirms this emphasis on research over teaching: only two article titles include references to teaching or pedagogy while nineteen titles include the word "research." Full-text searches of the contents of the ninety articles published to date in DHQ reveal a less marked disparity between research and teaching and pedagogy: while the word "research" garners eighty-one hits in total (nine of every ten articles that DHQ has published), "teaching" and "learning" each total at least forty hits (and twenty-six when paired), while "pedagogy" appears a mere nine times (averaging about one of every ten articles). This quick and somewhat unnuanced survey of DHQ suggests that, while research is the dominant focus of much of what scholars choose to publish in the journal, there is some interest in and focus on (albeit a limited one) the broader implications of DH work for teaching and learning.4

Brett Bobley, director of the NEH's Office of Digital Humanities, recently offered a broad definition of the digital humanities in a January 2011 radio interview, noting that "digital humanities is really applying digital technology to doing traditional study and also trying to determine how do you use technology best in

a classroom setting. So it's really about both the research and the education." Yet the cover of the Office of Digital Humanities' September 2010 "Summary Findings of NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants (2007–2010)"—which features a Wordle word cloud drawn from the text of the abstracts of all of the office's funded start-up grants—does not include the words "teaching," "learning," "classroom," or "pedagogy." The word "research," on the other hand, is among the ten most frequently used words in all the abstracts, along with "project," "director," "digital," and "humanities." Again, this does not mean that none of the NEH-supported digital humanities start-up projects funded over the past three years was concerned or engaged with questions of teaching and learning. Several focused, at least in part, on the application of the digital humanities to classroom teaching or graduate education. Rather, the absence of key words like pedagogy and teaching in the abstracts suggests that these approaches are not yet primary in terms of digital humanists' own conceptions of their work, at least among those who apply to the NEH's Office of Digital Humanities for funding support.

Instead of belaboring this point about the primacy of the research focus in the current DH world, this essay will look instead at DH through the lens of the scholarship of teaching and learning,⁷ exploring in particular the pedagogical implications of digital technologies for the ways we educate the current generation of college students. Building on my own and my City University of New York (CUNY) colleagues' diverse efforts and experiences in incorporating digital technologies into a variety of CUNY educational programs and initiatives at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, this essay will offer an alternative vision of the digital humanities that is engaged in the project of improving the quality of classroom teaching practices and learning outcomes.

The City University of New York is a good place to focus such a discussion about the scholarship of teaching and learning and the impact of digital technologies in general and the digital humanities in specific. From its origins in the midnineteenth century, CUNY's stated purpose was to educate "the children of the whole people,"8 as expressed by the first president of the Free Academy (later the City College) on the occasion of its opening in 1849. Over the course of the next 160 years, CUNY (which was only consolidated in its current incarnation in 1961) became the nation's largest urban public university system, this year enrolling more than 260,000 matriculating students and an equal number of continuing and professional education students on twenty-three different campuses across the city's five boroughs. CUNY's extraordinary growth over the past half century required that its faculty and administrators be willing to undertake (or at least minimally tolerate) a series of radical experiments in pedagogy and open access that have put CUNY at the forefront of national efforts to effect educational change and transformation, including (but not limited to) pioneering efforts in the digital humanities and the educational uses of digital technologies. CUNY's long-standing focus on innovative pedagogy inflects the institution's orientation and that of its faculty and doctoral students toward digital technology. It's not that CUNY faculty and doctoral students are disinterested in the kinds of research questions that digital humanities work has chosen to focus on; rather, our interest in digital humanities is significantly shaped by our institution's deep and abiding commitment to educate successive waves of the city's working-class students. Let me illustrate CUNY's special focus on innovative pedagogy by reviewing a series of major digital projects and initiatives undertaken by CUNY faculty members and doctoral students over the past two decades.

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Initiative

CUNY threw open its doors to thousands of new working-class students when it launched its open admissions experiment in 1969. Open admissions allowed all high school graduates from any New York City public school to gain entry to CUNY's senior and community colleges on the basis of having received a high school diploma. This approach put tremendous pressure on the system to provide remedial instruction in math and especially in writing, given the New York City public schools' acknowledged failures in these years (Traub, 43-80). Mina Shaughnessy, who began teaching basic writing at City College in 1967 on the eve of the open admissions era (which lasted three decades in all), emerged as an internationally recognized expert on teaching writing to underprepared working-class students entering CUNY. Those students received remedial writing (and mathematics) instruction through the City College of New York's (and later CUNY's) Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) program. Shaughnessy, through her emphasis on writing as an academic discipline, inspired several generations of CUNY teachers of writing who carried on and significantly broadened her work in the decades following her death in 1978.9

Responding to increasing pressure to improve CUNY's flagging academic reputation emanating from the administration of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and from New York City opinion makers including the *New York Post*, CUNY's Board of Trustees voted to end the university's open admissions "experiment" in 1999. With the demise of open admissions, the CUNY administration launched the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiative in the same year. WAC represented a continuation of CUNY's commitment to teach writing skills as a critical component of educating CUNY's working-class student body. The WAC program was built on the deployment of dozens of doctoral-level writing fellows at various CUNY senior and community college campuses. Many WAC fellows were composition/rhetoric doctoral students studying in the CUNY Graduate Center's English PhD Program; they articulated a special academic interest in and commitment to theorizing and improving the teaching of writing skills and practices. The WAC program grew dramatically over the next decade, with as many as 150 writing fellows employed each year, embracing the use of a variety of teaching methodologies to

improve writing across all courses and academic programs at CUNY community and senior colleges, as well as at the CUNY Law School and the CUNY School of Professional Studies.¹⁰

Almost from the outset of the WAC program, writing fellows helped push the integration of digital technologies into WAC pedagogy. At Baruch College, for example, home to CUNY's business school, the WAC program launched Blogs@ Baruch in 2008, an online publishing and academic networking platform, built in WordPress and BuddyPress, which is used for course weblogs, student journals and publications, curriculum development, administrative communication, and faculty development. Twenty-seven writing fellows and three full-time staff collaborate with hundreds of Baruch faculty members, supporting nearly four-hundred course sections with an enrollment of more than fourteen thousand Baruch students annually. The use of writing fellows and social media and other digital technologies to enhance teaching and learning has grown in the past several years on many CUNY campuses (though nowhere quite as dramatically as at Baruch).¹¹

The American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning/ New Media Lab

The American Social History Project (ASHP), which I cofounded at CUNY in 1981 with the late social historian Herbert Gutman, was a pioneer in the development of digital history, an early exemplar of digital humanities work. Among the project's most important accomplishments was its Who Built America? (WBA) multimedia U.S. history curriculum, which included textbooks, videotapes, and teacher and student guides that were widely used to transform the teaching of American history in college and high school history classrooms in New York City and across the country. The WBA multimedia curriculum also included perhaps the nation's first digital publication in U.S. history, the CD-ROM *Who Built America? From the Centennial Celebration of 1876 to the Great War of 1914*, conceived and written by the late Roy Rosenzweig, Steve Brier, and Joshua Brown and published by the Voyager Company in 1993.¹²

A hallmark of the WBA multimedia curriculum and of ASHP's digital humanities work in general has been the project's quarter-century-long commitment to using digital media to enhance the quality of teaching and learning of history at the high school and undergraduate levels. Working closely and collaboratively with humanities teachers across the country in a series of grant-supported projects over the past two decades, the ASHP staff helped pioneer a set of active learning strategies to improve history teaching, emphasizing, for example, the uses of primary source documents and visual source materials available online as a way to encourage students' deeper immersion in historical thinking and history making.

In 1999, ASHP expanded its digital reach beyond history by creating the New Media Lab (NML) at the CUNY Graduate Center, which provides an interdisciplinary

laboratory environment for doctoral faculty and students to work collaboratively to integrate digital media into their academic scholarship, regardless of academic discipline. The NML has hosted the development and production of a number of digital humanities projects by CUNY faculty and doctoral students, including (to name but two) the Phylo Project (which mapped the intellectual, institutional, and personal interconnections in the academic field of philosophy) and the Virtual Poetry Project, a web-based multimedia exploration of Latin American poets and poetry.¹³

The Interactive Technology and Pedagogy Doctoral Certificate Program

The Interactive Technology and Pedagogy Certificate Program (ITP) at the CUNY Graduate Center, which I conceived and have coordinated since its founding in 2002, is an interdisciplinary program that provides doctoral students from a range of academic disciplines with opportunities to reflect on the broader theory behind and pedagogical implications of digital technology usage in the academy. The program features theoretical and conceptual discussions about the cultural, economic, legal, political, and personal impact of technological transformation across time; hands-on engagement with a range of digital technology tools, including blogs and wikis; as well as ongoing conversations about how these digital tools can best be used to enhance academic research and the quality of teaching and learning. Since so many Graduate Center doctoral students are employed at various CUNY campuses as instructors, with sole responsibility for teaching large introductory survey courses to undergraduates in their academic disciplines, the uses of digital technology to improve pedagogy is of particular interest to our doctoral students. A number of ITP certificate holders have been able to use their skills in digital technology and pedagogy to find both traditional academic positions in universities and colleges around the country and internationally as well as nontraditional digital humanities and digital pedagogy positions and postdocs. These ITP graduates, along with New Media Lab participants and American Social History Project staff, are committed to using cutting-edge digital research techniques, innovative presentational forms, and open and active pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning to improve the quality of their current and future academic work.¹⁴

The Instructional Technology Fellows Program at the Macaulay Honors College

The founding of CUNY's Macaulay Honors College (MHC) in 2001 included a commitment to hire and deploy a corps of Instructional Technology Fellows (ITFs), advanced doctoral students at CUNY's Graduate Center drawn from diverse academic disciplines. The twenty-five ITFs currently employed by MHC are assigned to eight different CUNY campus honors programs and at the central MHC facility. Like the CUNY writing fellows, ITFs work closely with MHC faculty and undergraduates to help them use digital tools—including blogs, wikis, discussion

forums, and podcasts—"to support collaboration, integrative learning, community building, and student-centered pedagogies." The ITFs are among CUNY's most advanced digital scholars and teachers, with broad knowledge about the uses of digital technology and digital pedagogy. And like the ITP certificate holders, the MHC ITFs have a solid record in securing full-time academic positions at colleges and universities once they finish their two or three years at Macaulay and complete their PhDs. MHC Associate Dean Joseph Ugoretz has suggested that the success of Macaulay's ITFs in the academic job market is the result of at least as much of their experiences as digital pedagogues as their skill as digital scholars. ¹⁶

"Looking for Whitman"

A good example of a recent CUNY digital humanities project that combines digital research and digital pedagogy is "Looking for Whitman: The Poetry of Place in the Life and Work of Walt Whitman," conceived and headed by Matthew K. Gold at New York City College of Technology, CUNY (NYCCT). The semester-long project was designed to bring together undergraduates enrolled in four different courses at four geographically dispersed college campuses (NYCCT and New York University [NYU] in New York City, University of Mary Washington in Virginia, and Rutgers-Camden in New Jersey) to collaborate on an exploration of Whitman's poetry in relationship to specific places in which Whitman lived and labored. The participating students and faculty members regularly shared ideas, research, and feedback about Whitman's life and writing on the project's WordPress site. The fourmonth effort ended in April 2010 with a face-to-face "generative" conference held at Rutgers-Camden, which not only included reports on what had been accomplished by the students on each of the four campuses during the previous fall semester but also featured continued creation of scholarly content and student presentations about Whitman's life and poetry, all captured on digital video and displayed on the project's website. "Looking for Whitman" is a model for how digital scholarship and digital pedagogy can be combined to enhance undergraduate teaching as well as how social networking tools can help bridge very real geographical, economic, and cultural gaps among and between universities and colleges.¹⁷

The CUNY Academic Commons

The development in 2009 of the CUNY Academic Commons (AC) was a critical step taken by CUNY faculty members and administrators, led by George Otte and Matthew K. Gold, to create a unified platform for scholarly communication across CUNY that could pull together individual academics working with or interested in digital technologies and pedagogies under a single, broad, digital umbrella. The Academic Commons was conceived as an accessible, collaborative public arena on the Internet (http://www.commons.gc.cuny.edu), built in WordPress and BuddyPress,

which is, in the words of one of the ACs operating documents, "dedicated to the free expression of our users in a collaborative [shared] environment. We are a community that seeks to use the Academic Commons as a means of fulfilling our highest aspirations for integrating technology into our teaching, learning, and collaborating." ¹⁸

The AC's emphasis is on building academic community in all its diverse permutations and forms. In the eighteen months since its launch, the AC has garnered nearly two thousand CUNY members (only CUNY faculty members, staff, and doctoral students are eligible to join) who use the AC's group sites, blogs, and wikis to find and inform one another, to teach doctoral courses, and to collaborate on digital and other types of academic projects and groups (including, it should be noted, CUNYPie, a group of CUNY academics/fanatics in search of the best pizza served in New York City's five boroughs). The AC has already generated extensive notice in the academic press (including feature articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education, Educause Review*, and other online academic publications) as well as inquiries from numerous universities and colleges looking to emulate CUNY's efforts by creating their own academic commons.

The existence of AC proved especially helpful last year when a group of faculty and doctoral students from across the CUNY system, under the aegis of the CUNY Digital Studies Group, which I founded and cochair, decided to organize a major conference, "The Digital University: Power Relations, Publishing, Authority and Community in the 21st Century Academy." The conference, supported by the Graduate Center's Center for the Humanities, was an effort to broaden notions of the digital humanities beyond academic scholarship and publication to include digital approaches to teaching, learning, and pedagogy. The all-day event, held at the CUNY Graduate Center in April 2010, drew more than 140 scholars and teachers from around the world, was the subject of a vigorous and sustained Twitter stream (#du10), and featured a series of smaller workshops and a keynote address by Siva Vaidhyanathan, which engaged critical issues related to academic scholarship, academic publication, peer review, and digital pedagogy.¹⁹

Digital Humanities Initiative

The success of "The Digital University" conference and its focus on the transformational possibilities of the digital humanities in the university led a group of CUNY faculty and doctoral students to launch the Digital Humanities Initiative (DHI) at CUNY. The DHI, cochaired by Matthew K. Gold and Charlie Edwards (a doctoral student in English and in the ITP certificate program), has in less than a year attracted more than one hundred DHers to its ranks from across the CUNY system. The group, in the words of its mission statement, is "aimed at building connections and community among those at CUNY who are applying digital technologies to scholarship and pedagogy in the humanities." It is important to note the equal weight given in the mission statement to scholarship and pedagogy. Working

under the aegis of the Digital Studies Group, the DHI has sponsored a series of talks and lectures on a range of DH-related research topics, including presentations by Tom Scheinfeldt of GMU's Center for History and New Media; Kathleen Fitzpatrick of Pomona College's Media Studies Program; David Hoover of NYU's English Department; and Patrik Svensson, director of HUMlab at Umeå University, Sweden. Consonant with its commitment to focus its work particularly on questions of pedagogy, the DHI has also offered several roundtable presentations on the relationship of DH to teaching and learning, including sharing of ideas and approaches to using off-the-shelf open source tools, including WordPress plug-ins to create paperless and networked classrooms. And at one of its first sessions in fall 2010, the DHI heard CUNY educational technologists Mikhail Gershovich, Joe Ugoretz, and Luke Waltzer discuss technology and pedagogy in the context of their teaching work at Baruch College and at the Macaulay Honors College.

Looking Ahead

I have provided this somewhat breathless survey of diverse projects and educational reform efforts at CUNY because they share a common focus on bridging the gap between digital scholarship and digital pedagogy. Each was designed to encourage CUNY faculty and doctoral students to engage in an extended conversation about the best strategies for improving classroom teaching and, increasingly over the past two decades, centering those conversations and strategies on the uses of digital technologies to enhance the prospects for improving teaching and learning. CUNY's growing focus over the past two decades on the scholarship of teaching and learning has by no means been limited to the digital humanities, narrowly defined. If we are willing to broaden our definition of digital humanities beyond academic research and related issues of academic publication, peer review, and tenure and promotion to encompass critical questions about ways to improve teaching and learning, then CUNY's various digital pedagogy projects and strategies offer an alternative pathway to broaden the impact of the digital humanities movement and make it more relevant to the ongoing and increasingly beleaguered educational mission of contemporary colleges and universities.

NOTES

1. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* is online at http://chronicle.com/section/ Home/5; the *Chronicle*'s *ProfHacker* blog is at http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/. The National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education recently (Summer 2010) defined the digital humanities as encompassing the humanities, interpretive social sciences, and the arts, an approach that echoes some funders' definition (cf. Mellon Foundation) and other national digital humanities projects (cf. Project Bamboo). See http://blogs.nitle.org/2010/08/31/nitle-launches-digital-humanities-initiative/.

- 2. Other scholars have pointed to DH's general exclusion of issues of pedagogy, including Katherine Harris at California State University, Long Beach, who has been particularly vocal about this issue. See her blog for comments on DH and pedagogy: http://triproftri.wordpress.com/. Professor Harris and I helped carry the pedagogy banner at several of the workshops at Project Bamboo, an ongoing international organizing effort, funded by the Mellon Foundation and headed up by the University of California Berkeley and the University of Chicago, to build a set of collaborative digital humanities tools to enhance academic scholarship. See http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/07/our-commitment-to-digital-humanities.html, accessed March 19, 2011, for Google's statement announcing the first recipients of its digital humanities research grants.
- 3. Quotations from the "About DHQ" section of DHQ's website: http://digital humanities.org/DHQ/about/about.html.
- 4. Searches were conducted from the DHQ's home page: http://digitalhumanities.org/DHQ/.
- 5. The *Kojo Nnamdi Show*, January 11, 2011, WAMU 88.5 FM, American University Radio podcast and transcript: http://thekojonnamdishow.org/shows/2011-01-11/history -meets-high-tech-digital-humanities/transcript.
- 6. The Office of Digital Humanities (ODH) report can be found at http://www.neh .gov/whoweare/cio/odhfiles/Summary.Report.ODH.SUG.pdf.
- 7. The simplest definition of the scholarship of teaching and learning has been offered by the eponymous Carnegie Academy at Illinois State University: "systematic reflection on teaching and learning made public." See http://www.sotl.ilstu.edu/.
- 8. Association of the Bar of the City of New York, Report of the Commission on the Future of CUNY: Part I Remediation and Access: To Educate the "Children of the Whole People," 1999. http://www2.nycbar.org/Publications/reports/show_html_new.php?rid=47.
- 9. Background information on Shaughnessy can be found on Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mina_P._Shaughnessy) and in Jane Maher's biography, *Mina P. Shaughnessy: Her Life and Work*.
- 10. CUNY's dean of undergraduate education produced a history of CUNY's Writing Across the Curriculum Program, "Writing Across the Curriculum at CUNY: A Ten-Year Review," which can be found at http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/ue/wac/WAC10YearReportJune2010.pdf.
- 11. Information about Blogs@Baruch provided by Mikhail Gershovich, telephone interview with the author, March 26, 2011. Gershovich is the director of the Bernard Schwartz Communications Institute (BSCI), Baruch College (CUNY). BSCI oversees the WAC program at the college. The integration of digital media at Baruch and its impact on the college's freshman seminars can be seen by reading the multiple blog posts and viewing the student-produced videos at http://blsciblogs.baruch.cuny.edu/fro/. The Schwartz Institute and its pioneering work in CUNY's WAC program were featured in Fara Warner's online article, "Improving Communication Is Everyone's Responsibility," http://www.changemag

 $. org/Archives/Back\%20 Issues/November-December\%20 2008/full-improving-communication \\ \ \ \, html$

- 12. Information about the WBA multimedia curriculum can be found at http://ashp.cuny.edu/who-america/. Developing the first WBA CD-ROM in 1991 and 1992 might well qualify Rosenzweig, Brown, and Brier for special status as "premature digital humanists." For those unfamiliar with the historical reference, this phrase echoes the U.S. Communist Party's labeling of those who fought (and in many cases died) to defend the Spanish Republic in 1936 as "premature antifascists."
- 13. ASHP received research center status in CUNY in 1992 with the founding of the Center for Media and Learning (CML). ASHP and CML have been led by Josh Brown since 1998. Information about ASHP, CML, and the New Media Lab can be found at http://ashp.cuny.edu/and http://nml.cuny.edu/. The Phylo Project can be viewed at http://phylo.info. The Visual Poetry Project can be viewed at http://nml.cuny.edu/poetryproject/vpp/index.php/vpp/index.
- 14. Information about the Interactive Technology and Pedagogy Certificate Program can be found at http://web.gc.cuny.edu/itp/.
- 15. Quote is from the description of the Macaulay Honors College's uses of instructional technology on the school's website: http://macaulay.cuny.edu/academics/technology.php.
 - 16. Joseph Ugoretz, e-mail message to the author, March 27, 2011.
- 17. The *Looking for Whitman* WordPress site can be found at http://lookingforwhitman.org.
- 18. CUNY Academic Commons Terms of Service, http://commons.gc.cuny.edu/about/tos/.
- 19. The conference's website (http://digitaluniversity.gc.cuny.edu/) offers the most complete sense of what we hoped to accomplish and what actually transpired.
- 20. DHI's mission statement can be found at http://commons.gc.cuny.edu/groups/digital-humanities-initiative/.

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