
Sustaining and Scaling the Digital Liberal Arts

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When we invoke the Digital Liberal Arts, we are not so much proposing a field that is by definition distinct from Digital Humanities—after all, both terms are notoriously subject to endless re-definition and contestation. Instead, we mean to strategically (and politically) call attention to the kinds of digital scholarship and pedagogy that are being conducted outside of traditional Research 1 institutions with well-funded DH centers. What conjoins our papers, then, is not so much that they present a series of new case studies in teaching with the digital: many people, we agree, could do that. Rather, we intend to prompt discussion and reflection about the kinds of infrastructures that are necessary (and perhaps not necessary) to produce sustainable and meaningful digital scholarship. Early on, Pannacker proposed that small liberal arts institutions and programs might be uniquely positioned for rapid, more cost-effective innovation, because we have “shallower administrative hierarchies and less institutional inertia.” (Pannacker 2013) All of us hail from programs that “share a culture of faculty-student collaborative research, which translates perfectly into the project-building methods of the digital humanities” (Pannacker 2013).

For these reasons, we are pondering the differences between large university DH and small college DH: a diffuse, decentralized approach to DH versus a more systematic and integrated one. Our varied papers share several connecting themes: collaboration across disciplines, roles and institutions; and the central place of pedagogy. The idea of pedagogy is critical to the mission of liberal arts colleges, and thus will feature prominently in this discussion. We place pedagogy at the center of all our work. There is much that larger institutions can learn from this discussion, including ways to make DH more student-centered and pedagogically oriented. Without romanticizing student-centered projects (we will also address some of the challenges for public scholarship with such a variety of skills at the table) we want to explore how involving students in the co-production of knowledge – digitally mediated and publicly presented – shapes and reshapes what is possible under “DH.”

Bibliography

Pannacker, W. (2013). “Stop Calling It ‘Digital Humanities’”. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 18 February. Web. http://www.chronicle.com/article/Stop-Calling-It-Digital/137325/jobs_topjobs-slider