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## A Capacity Building Framework for Institutional Digital Humanities Support

**Quinn Dombrowski**  
quinnd@berkeley.edu  
UC Berkeley, United States of America

**Joan Lippincott**  
joan@cni.org  
Coalition for Networked Information  
United States of America

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The development of well-known institutional digital humanities programs-- such as those at the University of Virginia, University of Victoria, University of Maryland, and others -- has been significantly influenced by unique combinations of dynamic individuals and receptive institutional circumstances. Faculty and administrators in leadership positions at a growing number of universities are interested in developing some form of institutional support for digital humanities research and/or pedagogical practices, but are starting with a fragmented local landscape. Where previous work has focused on particular facets of successful digital humanities programs (e.g. organizational models in Maron & Pickle 2014), addressed digital humanities within a particular organizational context (e.g. in libraries, Varner & Hswe 2016 and Schaffner & Erway 2014) or provided case studies from a single institution (Maron 2011), to date there has not been a holistic framework that can serve as a guide for improving institutional support.

In spring 2016, the EDUCAUSE Center for Analysis and Research (ECAR) and the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI) convened a working group of fifteen library and IT professionals representing a wide range of institution types in the US and Canada, with the goal of developing a “maturity framework” for institutions that are either getting started on developing a digital humanities support program/center or striving make additional progress with their existing efforts. While the maturity framework model is commonly used in ECAR working group publications to describe the adoption or implementation of new technologies or methodologies, particularly in an IT context, the

working group quickly reached a unified decision that “maturity” was the wrong model for the development of a digital humanities program. Instead, the working group adopted a similar structure -- using defined stages of development across multiple parameters-- and termed it a “capacity building framework”, in order to acknowledge that different institutions may prioritize different kinds of capacity, and those choices have little bearing on the “maturity” of the program as a whole.

The working group’s recently-published white paper identifies five major facets of developing institutional support for digital humanities, and characterizes for each one three stages in the development of institutional digital humanities support: early, established and high capacity. The paper acknowledges that different institution types, and even individual institutions, will choose different areas to prioritize, and there is no “one-size-fits-all” recommendation.

1. **Governance** -- how, and at what level(s), are decisions made? At the early stage, there is no governance in place beyond the individual project level. As a result, individual projects or courses flourish, or fail to do so, largely based on individual PIs’ personal connections and ability to secure funding and resources. For well-connected and charismatic scholars, the early stage may seem like the ideal one, as there are no systems in place to impede them from making any technical decision that suits them, and involving as many support staff as they can convince to participate. While the early stage model may be conducive to individual project capacity, given a particular kind of PI, it does little to build capacity at the institutional level. The white paper takes the position that governance is an important aspect of institutional capacity-building, by providing structures for transparent decision-making that apply equally to all projects. Depending on the institution, governance structures may be in place to determine allocation of internal grant funding or consulting resources, coordinate the purchase of software licenses or expensive hardware, and/or provide input into larger decisions in program development (e.g. whether or how to offer degree programs, whether to participate in consortial efforts to develop infrastructure or training programs, etc.)

2. **Infrastructure** -- providing access to both technology and expertise -- sits at the core of institutional support programs for digital humanities. The specific tools and resources provided can vary across institutions, depending on the needs and interests of researchers and instructors, as well as the particular skills and expertise of those providing support. The white paper notes that the effectiveness of technical infrastructure is contingent upon the availability of experts who can help scholars make use of that technology. While this is especially true for resources that have a high barrier to entry (such as high performance computing clusters), it also applies to software (e.g. for GIS, 3D modeling, text analysis, and OCR) and more prosaic infrastructure such as web hosting.
3. **Roles and Capabilities** -- successful digital humanities work is most often conducted in teams, with roles and capabilities from three complementary categories: technical experts, champions of engagement, and content innovators. Within these broad categories, there is great deal of overlap and interdependence; and it is through the overlap of roles and interdependence of capabilities that DH can flourish. Depending on the organizational model in place, projects may draw upon skilled collaborators at various places within an institution (e.g. museums and archives, central IT units) or even at other institutions through consortial agreements.
4. **Communication and Outreach** -- in the early stage of institutional support for digital humanities, individual practitioners are not aware of one another, and there are no established channels for disseminating news and announcements about events, workshops, grants, and other opportunities relevant to digital humanities. As institutional support becomes established, digital humanities mailing lists and event calendars are created, funding is accessible for one-off events and activities, and beginner-oriented training becomes available. High capacity for communications and outreach involves coordinated, regular communication, dedicated funding for activities, and multiple levels of training covering a range of skills.
5. **Acceptance** -- i.e. the acceptance of digital humanities work as a component of promotion and tenure, of course assessment, and of performance reviews for librarians and IT staff. The white paper notes that academic acceptance of digital humanities work is significantly influenced by developments within particular disciplines, for example, the development of guidelines such as those produced by the Modern Language Association (2012), American Historical Association (2015), and College Art Association (2016) for evaluating digital humanities scholarship. Nonetheless, an institution can increase its capacity at the local level by having department chairs, deans and provosts publicly take a position supporting the assessment of digital scholarship as part of tenure dossiers and advocate for the consistent application of disciplinary guidelines, where available. Acceptance of digital humanities also applies to the evaluation of courses with digital humanities components, as well as to performance evaluations for librarians and staff who support digital humanities work. In the early stage, librarians and IT staff provide digital humanities support “on the margins” of their jobs, whereas at a higher-capacity stage, digital humanities support is an officially recognized aspect of IT staff and librarians’ job descriptions, and is factored into performance evaluations accordingly.

To complement the capacity building framework, the white paper includes a section on getting started with developing institutional capacity. This section has pointers for how to do an environmental scan and needs assessment, a discussion of interdisciplinarity, recommendations for the kinds of partnerships that support institutional capacity-building, and a number of commonly-used organizational models.

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