
DH Box

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This poster session will introduce DH Box, a browser-based platform that provides access to a variety of difficult-to-install digital humanities tools. Currently under development at The Graduate Center, CUNY, and funded by generous assistance from an NEH Startup Grant, DH Box is designed with particular attention to digital humanities pedagogy. Because teaching DH requires infrastructure of various kinds, including computing resources, IT support, and teachers with specialized training, student access to the digital humanities is unevenly distributed and highly dependent on local institutional conditions. Faculty with DH skills are often called upon to teach classes and workshops in adverse circumstances, contending with limited access to labs or other computing resources, restrictive IT policies that prevent new software from being installed, and platform fragmentation on student-owned machines. As a cloud-based platform, DH Box was conceived to address some of these concerns by providing a set of digital humanities tools through a unified computing environment accessed through the browser.

DH Box is not a service, nor is it a standalone application that runs on local computers. Rather, it is software that can be set up by teachers or institutions on cloud-based infrastructure such as Amazon Web Services or DigitalOcean. DH Box is an open-source project developed by and for teachers and researchers in the humanities, and as such is intended to provide an alternative to proprietary services that prevent access

to user data. DH Box also makes an intervention in terms of design, UX, and usability. The platform uses a virtualization technology called Docker to quickly create and remove digital working environments, providing students with access to either shared work spaces or individualized virtual machines. Each of these environments contains a set of tools and utilities frequently used in the digital humanities, including IPython Notebooks, the Natural Language Toolkit, MALLET, Omeka, and WordPress. DH Box's tab-based browsing interface makes it possible to easily switch between these utilities, the command line, and a text editor. In addition to providing DH tools in a unified computing environment, the platform offers resources in partnership with institutions like the British Library, making digitized texts available for student exploration. By integrating Git Lit, a tool for downloading text corpora developed in partnership with Columbia University, DH Box provides access not only to digital humanities tools, but also to materials for analysis and experimentation.

Even as it aims to circumvent institutional barriers to DH scholarship, DH Box addresses broader questions of access to DH tools. The necessity for specialized knowledge--use of the command line, importing packages and modules, configuring a working environment--may deter students from pursuing research questions using these novel methods. Making these tools more accessible, on the other hand, should help encourage a new generation of DH scholars. By allowing teachers and students to bypass the difficult process of installation and configuration, the DH Box team hopes to give them room to focus on exploration and experimentation. During the DH Box poster presentation, team members will be available to discuss decisions of design as well as future use cases.

Resources

For more information about DH Box, please refer to: Dhbox.org | [@DH_Box](https://twitter.com/DH_Box) | <https://github.com/DH-Box>