Libraries and Digital Research: Sharing the Incubator

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As humanities scholars embrace digital research and more content is digitized, tools and methods such as text mining and spatial analysis become increasingly more vital, especially to graduate students who are at a formative stage in their careers. Librarians and library staff are keen to support these researchers and meet the growing demand. To address this demand, UCLA librarians developed DResSUP (Digital Research Start Up Partnerships), a six-week summer program designed to create partnerships between library staff and researchers. At our institution, a core group of library staff have the expertise to engage with digital research projects beyond the initial phase of data discovery. Therefore DResSUP was initially built around this core group, allowing us to build a local community of practice and test our capacity for supporting digital projects. We have purposely kept the program small; working with a cohort of four to six graduate student "partners" each summer. Our strategy was, no doubt, also influenced by discussions of sustainability in the Digital Humanities community (see, for example, Maron and Pickle, 2014). What if we built a new program as though we were already in the sunset period? How could we minimize costs, maximize impact, build deep connections with researchers, respect ethical issues of graduate student labor, and facilitate engagement between library staff and researchers? We knew about minimal computing, but could we create a "minimal program" and still have an impact?

The goal of the program is to provide graduate students with skills and methods to continue the projects on their own. Rather than doing projects for them, we focus instead on teaching students to start with a small sample of their own dataset, working it through the research data lifecycle: collecting, cleaning, and analyzing/visualizing data, supplemented by a workshop on project management and the specific tools that are applicable to the students' research projects. In the second half of the program, we focus on the execution of their individual projects, building prototypes and adjusting workflows that allow them to complete their projects independently.

After successfully offering this program for the past two years, we are expanding the program in ways that we hope will increase the library's capacity to support digital scholarship, which will make the program more sustainable over time and allow us to reach more researchers. Perhaps because we took a low-profile, grassroots approach, and because of general resistance to "reskilling" or "retooling" efforts, the most surprising response to DResSUP for us has been the enthusiasm and curiosity of our library colleagues. As they have learned more about the program, they have expressed interest in participating. However, at the same time, they raised legitimate concerns about their ability to support advanced digital research methods. Recognizing that they face a steep learning curve, one that will require additional resources to surmount, we have designed an expansion to the program, developing a second track for professional development for librarians.

Similar to Columbia University Library's [Developing Librarian](#) and Indiana's [Research Now](#) librarian training programs, we will take a project-based approach to professional development for librarians. But, rather than developing a separate program, librarians will participate in the extended DResSUP program, starting earlier in the year, gradually merging with the summer DResSUP graduate students. We will begin working with a small cohort of librarians in January 2017, who will follow the same curriculum as the graduate students. By Summer, the librarian cohort will have a plan for a collaborative digital research project.

Our short paper will begin by presenting DResSUP as it has functioned the past two years and our plans for the next three years, based on preliminary findings from this second librarian track of DResSUP which, by DH2017, will be well underway. We reason that by building capacity in our library community among permanent staff we can extend and grow DResSUP in

ways that are beneficial to both researchers and those responsible for building and maintaining the infrastructure that supports those endeavors. We will then discuss results from an open-ended questionnaire that we have designed to surface some of the issues around collaboration between librarians and digital humanities researchers (Siemens et al, 2011) and provide concrete suggestions for faculty, library administrators, and library staff members. Typically, the library's role in a digital project is negotiated when faculty are writing grant proposals and seek assistance with a required data management plan. We will argue that this strategy puts librarians at a disadvantage, having to function as gatekeepers in a bargaining process when researchers are hard pressed to stretch precious resources between their research goals and an institution's needs to cover the costs of supporting research functions.

Finally, we will discuss the ways in which merging professional development for librarians with graduate students provides advantages by focusing library engagement efforts at an earlier stage, i.e., when graduate students begin research for their dissertations or when they begin working as research assistants. We will argue that graduate students function as vectors for spreading the message that librarians can provide valuable expertise: they teach undergraduate students, their peers, and their faculty. In this way, librarians can expand their impact, by focusing strategically on graduate students.

Bibliography

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