Digital Humanities

Librarian Survey Results – December 2015
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Executive Summary

Librarians recognize the importance of libraries in digital humanities.

- Almost all indicated that digital humanities materials and outcomes should be included in the library collection.
- Seven out of ten indicated that acquiring, transcribing, and encoding should be shared by the library and the digital humanist faculty.
- Six out of ten librarians felt that a digital humanities librarian should be a “full-fledged project collaborator and participant”.

However, the current role of the library in digital humanities appears unclear.

- Four out of ten librarians described their services as “ad hoc” and almost one of five said they were not offered.
- One in five librarians did not know what was the best model for digital humanities.
- One in five librarians indicated that they provided no services to users who are engaged in digital humanities projects.
- Nine out of ten librarians indicated their library does not have a written statement describing support for digital humanities.
The overall assessment of current services provided is quite low and there appears to be a number of different needs required to support digital humanities.

- The overall assessment of their library’s services for digital humanities is quite low with an average of 5 on a 0-to-10 scale.
- The most common challenges included difficulty connecting with faculty and lack of institutional commitment.
- Half of librarians indicated they do not know what their administration wants their library’s role to be in the future.
- The most common need mentioned by librarians was related to staff (either more needed or more knowledgeable).
- The most common competencies a digital librarian needs were related to specific technical skills.
Background and Objectives

• Digital Humanities products and methods have around for decades. However, in recent years there has been a new set of constituencies for librarians who have some expertise in digital humanities such as faculty and graduate students\(^1\).

• As a result, libraries are recognizing that they may need to invest more resources such as staff expertise and time, technology, and physical spaces to make a more formal commitment by the library to this type of scholarship.

• The objective of this research is to determine key characteristics of librarians involved in digital humanities projects and their current and future needs.

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Librarian Perspectives on Digital Humanities
When asked to define digital humanities librarians mentioned a wide range of characteristics. Common themes included online access to electronic tools such as databases or texts in the disciplines of humanities and could include research.

A1: How do you define “digital humanities”? (n=339)
Six out of ten librarians felt that a digital humanities librarian should be a “full-fledged project collaborator and participant”.

- Some feel that the primary role should be as a liaison to existing library services or helping to find available sources.
- Few librarians feel the primary role should be a support staff.

B4: What primary role should a digital humanities librarian play at an institution? (n=339)
Seven out of ten indicated that acquiring, transcribing, and encoding should be shared by the library and the digital humanities faculty.

One out of five librarians believe this should be done by the library and one out of ten believe this should be done by the digital humanities faculty.

B5: Should the library be acquiring, transcribing, and encoding the source materials, or is that something that digital humanities faculty should do? (n=339)
Almost all indicated that digital humanities materials and outcomes should be included in the library collection.

B6: Should digital humanities materials and project outcomes be included in the library collection? (n=339)
Library Support of Digital Humanities
Two out of five librarians indicated that a network model was the best for digital humanities.

One in five librarians did not know what was the best model for digital humanities.

Network model: In this model, multiple units whose services were formed to meet a specific need and have developed over time come together to form a system of end-to-end support.

Service model: In this model, the service unit seeks to meet the demand expressed by faculty, often with a strong focus on meeting an individual’s research needs.

Lab model: In this model, the lab tends to have a specific focus, tied either to the mission of the campus or to the aims of their founders, which necessarily means that many do not take on responsibility for digital projects that fall outside of the scope.

Don’t know

Other (please describe)
The most common way to describe services that support digital humanities projects was “ad hoc”.

Four out of ten librarians described their services as “ad hoc”, almost one of five said they were not offered, and almost one out of five said they support multiple disciplines.

S1: Which of the following statements best describes services that support digital humanities projects at your institution? (n=339)

- The library provides ad hoc services that support digital humanities projects: 41%
- Digital scholarship services are not offered at my institution: 17%
- The library hosts a digital scholarship center that supports multiple disciplines, including the humanities: 17%
- Services for digital humanities projects are hosted outside the library: 6%
- The library hosts a digital scholarship center that is specifically dedicated to the humanities: 5%
- The library hosts digital scholarship services but not for humanities projects: 3%
- Other (please describe): 12%
A2. What is your library’s current role in digital humanities at your institution? (Multiple response, n=339)

Other common roles for the library included helping plan for preservation needs, creating avenues for scholarly use of metadata, and advocating for coordinated support across the institution.

- An institutional repository to accommodate digital humanities digital objects (54%)
- Help scholars plan for preservation needs (50%)
- Create avenues for scholarly use and enhancement of metadata (46%)
- Advocate coordinated digital humanities support across the institution (43%)
- Consult digital humanities scholars at the beginning of digitization projects (37%)
- Get involved in digital humanities project planning for sustainability from the beginning (33%)
- Co-sponsor grant applications (26%)
- Work to spur co-investment in digital humanities across institutions (22%)
- Digital humanities center located in our library (19%)
- Package existing services as a “virtual digital humanities center” (15%)
A quarter indicated that it is subject librarian that provides support for digital humanities projects.

A “digital scholarship/humanities librarian” was mentioned by about one in five librarians as a another common category of library staff that provides services for digital humanities.

A3: Please indicate which categories of library staff provide services that support digital humanities projects and whether these staff are dedicated to such services or are called on an ad hoc basis to meet demand. (n=339)

Average = 3.6
The two most common services offered by libraries included initial project development and infrastructure for repositories.

One in five librarians indicated that they provided no services to users who are engaged in digital humanities projects.

A6. Please indicate which of the following types of services your library offers users who are engaged in digital humanities projects. (Multiple response, n=339)
Over half of librarians indicated that students are using digital humanities resources and services.

A7: Are students using the digital humanities resources and services? (n=339)

- Yes, 52%
- No, 14%
- Don't know, 35%
Seven out of ten librarians indicated that their library encourages cross, trans, or inter-disciplinary projects.

A8: Does your library encourage/facilitate/promote cross-, trans-, or inter-disciplinary projects? (n=339)
The most common source of funding for digital humanities projects was the library operating budget.

Other common sources of funding included grants, academic departments, or special one-time funds.

A9. What is the source of funding for digital humanities projects? (Multiple response, n=339)
Nine out of ten librarians indicated their library does not have a written statement describing support for digital humanities.

A10: Does your library have a policy or written statement describing the ways in which it supports digital humanities projects? (n=339)
Eight out of ten librarians indicated that there is not a formal process for reviewing proposals for digital humanities projects.

A11: Is there a formal process for reviewing or developing proposals and allocating resources for digital humanities projects? (n=339)
Current and Future Needs of Librarians
The overall assessment of their library’s services for digital humanities is quite low with an average of 5 on a 0-to-10 scale.

Less than a quarter assessed their library’s effectiveness at a 7 or higher on a 0-to-10 point scale.

A13: Overall, how would you assess the effectiveness of your library’s digital humanities services? (0 = “Not at all effective”, 10 = “Extremely effective”, n=282)
The most common challenges included difficulty connecting with faculty and lack of institutional commitment.

Other challenges included a lack of authority to marshal appropriate resources, insufficient training, and inflexible infrastructure.

A12: What are the most common challenges you face regarding supporting digital humanities initiatives at your institution? (n=339)
Half of librarians indicated they do not know what their administration wants their library’s role to be in the future.

A quarter of librarians said that their administration wants them to be the leader for digital humanities in the future.

**B1. What does your university/college administration want your library’s role to be in digital humanities in the future? (Open-ended Response, n=339)**

- **I don’t feel they know enough about it yet to be able to envision a role.**
  - Don’t know, 51%

- **Good question. We have a new dean who has not shared his opinion on this matter.**
  - Other N/A, 8%

- **It is unclear. The IT division and library are not capable of the kind of collaboration due to a lack of vision and leadership.**
  - Be a leader, 25%

- **They want us to be a leader in terms of facilitating projects.**
  - To assist as needed.
  - Support and assistance, 16%

- **The administration wants that my library will be the focal point and a center of excellence for ensuring digital humanity for the time to come.**
  - Continue to support needs of academic departments & research centers

- **Sorry—don’t even know if our administration is aware of this trend/concept**
The most common need mentioned by librarians was related to staff (either more needed or more knowledgeable).

Other common needs were related to general training, resources such as computers, infrastructure or general funding.

B2. What staff, resources, or training does a library need to support digital humanities? (Coded open-ended response, n=339)
The most common competencies a digital librarian needs were related to specific technical skills.

Other common competencies required were related to the knowledge required or some specific credentials.

B3. What competencies/credentials does a digital humanities librarian need? (Open-ended response, n=339)
Respondent Profile
There was a mix of different types of libraries included such as undergraduate 4-year, graduate, and ARL.

C4: Which of the following best describes your library? (n=339)
Six out of ten librarians indicated their institution was public (government-funded).

C6: Is your institution public or private? (n=333)
The acquisition budget varied significantly – ranging from under $50,000 to $6 million or more.

C8: What was your library’s total acquisition budget (print and digital) for this academic year? (n=329)
Survey respondents had a wide range of job titles.

C1: Which of the following comes closest to your job title? (n=339)
Slightly less than half of librarians indicated that their institution offers tenure to librarians.

C2: Does your institution offer tenure to librarians? (n=339)
Appendix A: Approach
Approach

- An email invitation was sent to American Libraries librarian contacts.
- The invitation included a description of the study, an incentive of a drawing for one of ten $100 Tango Gift Cards, and the link to the online survey.
- The survey was in field during two time periods from October 2 to October 13, 2015 and from December 8 to December 13, 2015.
- The average length of the survey was 18 minutes and the median length was 15 minutes.
- The margin of error with 339 completes is approximately +/-5.3%, nineteen times out of twenty.