
ALLC Panel: Digital Resources in Humanities Research: Evidence of Value

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While most of us who do humanities computing need no convincing of its value, academic colleagues - including those on appointment and promotion panels - still need to be convinced, and even more so funders. If we want backing for the use and further development of digital resources, both data and processes, we need to collect more extensive concrete evidence of the ways in which they enable us to do research better, or to do research we would not otherwise be able to do, or to generate new knowledge in entirely new ways. Since the value of humanities research as a whole is qualitative, not quantitative, it is qualitative evidence in particular we should be looking for: digital resources providing the means not simply of doing research, but of doing excellent research.

One major task is therefore to accumulate a body of evidence of what researchers have done, and achieved, with digital resources— evidence that is not always as easy to find as one would wish. But what researchers do with these resources is also dependent on the nature and quality of the resources themselves: their academic rigour and completeness, and their technological design. Where a new digital research resource is created, to what extent does an assessment need to focus on the methods of analysis, design and construction of the resource, and to what extent on its usefulness to the community or communities of researchers? How important are the technical standards adopted? What about sustainability? What are the opportunities for re-use and for developing research materials that can be re-configured in a variety of ways?

We therefore need not only to accumulate evidence of value, but to think more about the criteria and methods we should use for doing so. For instance, where an analytical method is based on the methods used in other disciplines, e.g. statistics, there may be methods of assessment that can be likewise borrowed. Many of us believe the evidence is there, but we do not have the range of coherent, agreed and tested methods of assessment that will enable us to make assertions of value that will be reliable and will carry weight.

The panel session will seek to identify the range and kinds of evidence that exists, the methods of assessment that are needed, and the methods of re-use and reconfiguration that can give assurances of value.

Contributors:

David Robey (convenor): Introduction

Harold Short : Examples and case studies

Thornton Staples : Design and management for flexible use

Geoffrey Rockwell : Text analysis

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