Organic and Locally Sourced: Growing a Digital Humanities Lab with an Eye Towards Sustainability

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Abstract

In 2016, the Digital Matters Lab at the University of Utah launched a temporary "pop-up" space in the Marriott Library, the culmination of eighteen months of discussions between the College of Humanities, the College of Fine Arts, the College of Architecture+Planning, and the Marriott Library. After a previously unsuccessful attempt at creating a digital scholarship center in the late 2000s, our second attempt was rooted in skepticism. Why would this version be any more successful than the last? This paper chronicles how, learning from our mistakes, the Digital Matters Lab negotiated between a loose community of scholars and administrative stakeholders to navigate complex institutional legacies and bear a formal center with a cross-campus partnership, mission, and identity. The Lab's focus on environmental, financial, and technological sustainability emerged in response to the situated environment of Utah where water rights, public lands, and air quality are critical concerns. As a second iteration digital humanities/scholarship center, the Digital Matters Lab's emphasis on sustainability also reflects awareness of its vulnerability to the vicissitudes of administrative temperament or shifts in budgetary priorities. This case study concludes by looking to the future of the Digital Matters Lab in terms of scalability and permanence.

Introduction: First Tracks, Again

In the fall of 2016, the University of Utah launched the Digital Matters Lab[1] within a temporary "pop-up" space in the Marriott Library. However tenuous, it was nevertheless the culmination of eighteen months of meetings and policy writing sessions, and represented the first step toward future plans to build a permanent home — a 3,000 square foot lab complete with virtual reality studio, 3D printing, collaborative workspace, and classrooms. But the ghost of failure haunted these conversations, for this was the University of Utah's second attempt to build a Digital Humanities (or, depending on discipline, Digital Scholarship) lab. Reminders of efforts past emerged in unexpected ways throughout the process. For example, the Digital Matters exploratory working group discovered early on that we had a predecessor. A small group of librarians had led a similar group several years before, yet we had no record or knowledge of their efforts, accomplishments, and missteps. The challenge was two-fold: how could we track down the lessons learned from our first attempt if little institutional memory remained, and how could we persuade hesitant stakeholders that a second attempt would be worthwhile?

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This paper outlines the process through which we formed the Digital Matters Lab at the University of Utah in the face of the aforementioned challenges, and the factors that contributed to its launch. First, we recognized that the compulsion to bridge the humanities and arts with technology and computing was, is, and always will be, present on campus, albeit in unfocused and disparate forms. Regardless of whether the university pursued a DH initiative or not, these efforts would persist; and by dedicating a space, funds, and personnel to the Digital Matters Lab, the university would coalesce these efforts under a singular identity and focus. Second, due to a confluence of elements that we later describe in detail, several colleges — led by the Marriott Library — came together to agree to a cost-sharing scheme mitigating risk and easing financial burden. And third, Digital Matters staff agreed that the lab's focus and mission would be grounded

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in critical scholarship and engage locally with projects of significance to Utah and the broader Mountain West region. Building on that mission, we adopted a four year theme of "sustainability," which allowed us to think through concerns about digital humanities itself while also casting an eye toward our specific environmental challenges in Utah. Most importantly, we embraced the legacy of failure and adopted a skeptical framework to guide our approach. That is, we recognized ongoing campus DH research and avoided hyperbolic promises of the "new," eagerly collaborated both within and outside of the four partner colleges, and constantly refined the DML's identity and mission to reflect local interests and character.

Digital Humanities in Libraries: Three Subgenres

Creating a library-based digital humanities center is a now well-worn path of both success and struggle ("Registry of DH sites with library participation", 2018). Though several early digital humanities centers started in English departments, in recent decades there has been a migration to library-based models that range from a "virtual suite of services" to full-fledged digital humanities centers [Anne et al. 2017] [Kirschenbaum 2010] [Zhang et al. 2015].

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There are distinct advantages in placing DH centers in libraries. Libraries provide an inherently interdisciplinary space where faculty from across campus feel comfortable taking advantage of technology and services. Libraries have high-traffic physical spaces, technical infrastructure (server space, software, collections), and human expertise (metadata, copyright, data management, digital preservation, project management) that are potentially beneficial to digital humanities efforts. Many high-profile digital scholarship and digital humanities efforts are based in libraries such as HathiTrust at the University of Michigan Library, the Women Writers Project at Northeastern University Library, Chronicling America at the Library of Congress, and countless digital archives. Moreover, as libraries evolve from sites of knowledge circulation to knowledge production, an intimate relationship with a DH center is strategically and mutually beneficial [Vandegrift and Varner 2013].

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Despite a natural fit, in practice the majority of libraries tend to offer DH services in an ad hoc manner with many libraries struggling to find an optimal approach for DH engagement [Schaffner and Erway 2014]. Digital humanities in a library might be subsumed under a broader category of digital scholarship, digital publishing, digital library, or data management. Often there is a single librarian responsible for supporting or leading digital humanities efforts in addition to their core job duties.

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These issues are well-documented in a growing body of "DH+Lib" literature, which we see as consisting of three subgenres. The first chronicles strategies for building a DS/DH center or lab in resource-challenged environments. A. Miller, in "DH Start-Ups: A Library Model for Advancing Scholarship through Collaboration", details how Middle Tennessee State University's library was able to establish its Digital Scholarship lab in its library by forming strategic partnerships, co-opting faculty lines, and narrowing its mission and scope [Miller 2016]. Articles such as these are useful for visualizing the processes and steps required to formulate a digital humanities lab, particularly during financially challenged times. The various case studies in this corpus often focus on one or two main areas of strengths that bred success such as campus collaboration [Bayer 2014] [Gerber 2017] [Miller 2016] [Rosenblum and Dwyer 2016], community engagement [Sweeney et al. 2017], innovation [Nowviskie 2013], or evidence-based service design [Lindquist et al. 2016].

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A second genre of DH and library literature focuses on paradigmatic digital humanities projects produced either solely from libraries or as the result of library/campus partnerships. For example, in their book chapter, "Digital Public History in the Library", Battle, Mobley, and Gilbert chronicle their workflow and editorial process in curating the Lowcountry Digital History Initiative at the College of Charleston [Battle and Mobley 2016]. Our own contribution to the genre, "Kindles, card catalogs, and the future of libraries: a collaborative digital humanities project" highlights a topic modeling project initiated by two librarians, Anna Neatrour and Rebekah Cummings, and a digital humanities researcher, Dr. Elizabeth Callaway, at the University of Utah [Neatrour et al. 2018]. These contributions to the digital humanities and libraries corpus model a useful roadmap for other librarians to undertake similar projects.

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A third and final subgenre of DH+Lib articles focuses on the broader role that libraries can and should play in advancing and supporting digital humanities. The tone of these articles generally range from cautiously optimistic to openly

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skeptical regarding the investment that libraries make in digital humanities infrastructure. In "Evolving in Common: Creating Mutually Supportive Relationships Between Libraries and the Digital Humanities", Vandegrift and Varner focus on the strengths that libraries bring to DH and see academic librarians as valuable intellectual partners [Vandegrift and Varner 2013]. Schaffer and Erway, on the other hand, believe that only rarely should an academic library invest in a robust DH center and that, for most libraries, lower levels of support are a better use of resources [Schaffner and Erway 2014]. Other articles advocate caution and list items for consideration when investing in digital humanities [Kamada 2010] [Millson-Martula and Gunn 2017].

The aforementioned subgenres are not exhaustive nor are they mutually exclusive. Nearly every "Building a DH Center" paper highlights a successful project and reflects, at least implicitly, on the role libraries should play in digital humanities. Moreover, these articles frequently rely upon the experiences of the author in building a DH center or engaging in digital scholarship projects.

While this article fits squarely in the "Building a DH Center" genre, our aim is to do more than simply summarize our experience. Rather, by reflecting on our history and process, we identify the local, structural, and cultural factors shaping the Digital Matters Lab as well as generalizable lessons for building and sustaining a digital humanities center. For example, sustained engagement with digital humanities literature through biweekly reading groups informed our early decisions in setting a course for the Digital Matters Lab and helped us think critically about how our burgeoning lab fit into the larger ecosystem of DH Centers.

Boom and Bust: The History of DH Centers at the University of Utah (2007-2018)

As mentioned above, the Digital Matters working group quickly discovered that disparate digital humanities/scholarship efforts had been underway at the University of Utah for nearly a decade. In 2007, a technology instruction librarian at the Marriott Library returned from the Digital Scholarship/Digital Libraries Symposium at Emory University inspired to pursue a DH build. Fortuitously, her exposure to Digital Humanities coincided with a renovation at the Marriott Library that included a planned Advanced Technology Studio. Under her leadership, the multimedia center expanded to include Digital Humanities services, including qualitative data and textual analysis, GIS services, an AV Studio, and data management services, resulting in the Digital Scholarship Lab (DSL) in September 2009. By 2010, the Digital Scholarship Lab had hired a GIS specialist, reassigned three existing staff members to DSL, led a variety of software workshops, and hosted a Digital Scholarship Fair to highlight their burgeoning DH services.

The Digital Scholarship Lab failed. Despite early administrative buy-in, staff enthusiasm, and limited technological support, it was never able to summon a critical mass of engagement with campus partners. Post-recession funding required library administration to shift its focus to sustaining core library services, and campus assessments revealed a lack of interest and understanding of digital scholarship services. After seven years of struggle, it was subsumed by another department and the Digital Scholarship Lab was officially disbanded in 2014, while individual services such as GIS, data management, and the A/V Studio were spun off — and now thrive — in other areas, such as the Marriott Library's Creativity and Innovation Services department.

In many ways, the librarians at the Marriott Library were simply ahead of the curve; a robust digital scholarship community did not yet exist at the University of Utah. The Digital Scholarship Lab functioned in isolation of the rest of the campus, and efforts to offer services or engage in collaborative research fell short without resources for faculty incentives and/or established buy-in from administrators. Awareness of digital humanities had not yet reached the necessary inflection point for other departments to seek opportunities in the field. That is not to say that the DSL would have succeeded if it had simply appeared several years later, but the addiitonal burden of defining DH for stakeholders while the Digital Scholarship Lab was in its infancy compounded its difficulties. Finally, founding and housing the Digital Scholarship Lab in the library, for better or worse, brought to bear service-oriented associations that did not necessarily speak to more research-oriented faculty.

Ironically, just as library administration shuttered the doors on the Digital Scholarship Lab, elsewhere on campus, digital

humanities was starting to gain traction. Leveraging a block of funding for strategic hires in digital humanities, the English Department brought on two scholars in 2015 and 2016, Dr. David Roh and Dr. Lisa Swanstrom, with a mandate to build a DH community and space. Moreover, three colleges at the University of Utah — College of Humanities, College of Fine Arts, and College of Architecture+Planning — independently reached out to the Marriott Library in 2015 to gauge interest in developing a shared digital scholarship space. Still mindful of the Digital Scholarship Lab's isolation and failed attempts at engagement, early discussions overcorrected slightly — initial talks comprised of more than thirty representatives from all four partner colleges! After nearly a decade, administrative will, faculty research interests, and library support regarding digital humanities had finally converged.

The Digital Matters working group met from fall 2015 to spring 2017 and later transitioned to a more nimble steering committee, consisting of six representatives from all partner colleges, that assumed leadership and kept the deans apprised of its efforts. By 2015, "digital humanities" had become a common buzzword in academic libraries, and we strove to learn from the experiences of other libraries who had successfully built digital humanities programs. The first phase of information gathering included a series of interviews with Digital Humanities researchers Dan Cohen (Center for New Media and History, DPLA), Miriam Posner (UCLA Center for Digital Humanities), Bethany Nowviskie (University of Virginia Scholars' Lab), and John Unsworth (Brandeis University). A few notable themes emerged from these interviews:

1. A lab is a community. A strong community will be reflected in an active, vibrant space. To do so, the lab should be a democratic environment empowering students and staff. Moreover, staffing and expertise should take precedence over technology and decor.
2. Strong relationships with a supportive administration are necessary. Not only does administrative financial backing alleviate the need to rely on grant funding, but the importance of political capital should not be overlooked.
3. The mission should be driven by local needs. Some centers build tools, some support faculty, others digitize content, and still others emphasize teaching. Rather than trying to do everything in an unfocused manner, strategize, and be selective. A narrow and focused mission should guide priorities.

We worked in stages. The first stage would be establishing a physical presence on campus so that we could begin to build a community. In fall 2016, the Digital Matters Lab "Pop-Up" Space moved into the Marriott Library with a launch party. The space was light on technology but was equipped with collaborative spaces, whiteboards, and a few desktop workstations. More than offering computing power and expensive equipment, the temporary space became a hub where we could start building relationships by hosting talks, workshops, reading groups, and a monthly research interest group.

The second stage was to secure funding. Thanks to a mix of serendipity and infrastructure, in May 2016 the Marriott Library Development team secured $1 Million from an anonymous donor for staffing, equipment, and buildout of the Digital Matters Lab. Heeding the advice we had received in our exploratory phase, we elected to use the money to secure five years of staffing and modest equipment while we continue to raise money for the permanent space. The steering committee had to then discuss several questions regarding personnel: what constitutes core staff for a digital humanities space? Should they conduct a national search or hire from within? Is there an immediate need for a developer? The committee considered the merits hiring various configurations of Director, Librarian, Programmer/Developer, Operations Manager, graduate students, visiting fellows, grant writer, and post-docs. The finalized structure was determined by a consideration of the objectives and goals for the next five years — sustainability, a regional identity, and campus integration. Ultimately, the steering committee decided that the first hire would be the Digital Matters Director who would set a vision for the Lab including its long-term sustainability. The Marriott Library created a faculty line to hire a dedicated Digital Matters Librarian who would be responsible for supporting projects, organizing speakers, workshops, and various training opportunities, and liaising with relevant and existing library services such metadata, copyright, and IT services. Our five-year budget also included significant resources set aside to fund semester-long faculty and graduate student fellowships and to eventually hire a program assistant to staff the front desk, maintain the website, and assist the Director and Librarian in the operations and events of the Lab.

As of this writing, we are in the third and current stage — implementation. Over several months in 2017, the steering committee undertook the unglamorous work of hiring a director and librarian, procuring equipment, furniture, and a semi-permanent facility. Later, as the Digital Matters Lab became more of a known quantity, chance opportunities led to the hiring of an additional post-doctoral scholar from Environmental Humanities and faculty fellow from Multi-Disciplinary Design.

Local Color: Strategizing Around Projects (2018-present)

The Digital Matters Lab mission is to be the locus for digital humanities research on campus and to build a national reputation for our center, through integrating digital scholarship with cultural criticism and theory while remaining grounded in our local surroundings in Utah. We sought to penetrate the campus's consciousness by adding value, with the eventual goal of reaching financial and reputational stability so that the Digital Matters Lab can withstand budgetary vagaries.

We began the process by embarking on a fact-finding mission to learn the respective priorities and character of our partner departments and schools. We met regularly to develop relationships and, at times, define "digital scholarship" and "digital humanities" in relation to their fields. It was also imperative to carefully consider university legacies and strengths; for example, the University of Utah is renowned for its Entertainment Arts and Engineering (EAE)[2] program where students learn the fundamentals of video game development and animation. Accordingly, it would make sense for the Digital Matters Lab to incorporate game studies into its programming and projects. Similarly, the Marriott Library has an unparalleled Book Arts Program,[3] which focuses on the materiality and affordances of a print media; a strategic alignment of goals, including hosting credit-bearing classes and collaborative exhibitions, would be mutually beneficial.

Furthermore, it behooved us to learn of the individual researchers and centers on campus that have created digital scholarship and public-facing research projects. For example, since the 1960s, the American West Center[4] has collected and digitized oral histories of western peoples and lands. Faculty members in English and Computer Science had developed software for poetic visualization, Poemage.[5] Professors of dance worked in virtual reality environments, capturing choreography with drones. Over in the School of Music, a faculty member collaborated with metadata specialists in the library to create an opera database, SongHelix,[6] to promote discoverability of songs by a litany of criteria for recitals. When planning for the first year, it benefited us to meet with faculty to think through how to best serve, connect, and promote the existing research going on at the University of Utah.

To underscore the critical component and local environmental concerns of our mission, we selected a theme, *sustainability* as an organizing principle for the first four years. The theme helped us develop a narrative that would lend cohesiveness to our fledgling center and would also be legible to administration, donors, and other stakeholders. Forming connections and figuring out our place in the university and the broader digital community went hand-in-hand with building an identity as a lab that pushed the frontiers of critically-engaged digital research. We strategically chose projects, workshops, and speakers that integrated cultural criticism into their visions of digital arts and humanities. Sustainability not only prompts us to think of the durability of digital projects, but also asks us to think differently about the timescales on which we usually consider technology; instead of thinking in processing times and milliseconds, sustainability might prompt us to consider the millennia that our e-waste takes to degrade. Sustainability also challenges us to turn a critical eye toward our own methods, practices, and assumptions as digital humanities practitioners. We have to ask: what does digital humanities itself sustain? And how can we build a lab that is conscientious about what it seeks to sustain and what it chooses not to? Ultimately, the idea of *sustainability* challenged us not only to think thematically around environmental issues, but structurally as we considered the long-term viability of our projects in terms of preservation, documentation, and formats.

Finally, the theme of sustainability foregrounds our situatedness in Utah. At the same time that Utah has been the location of important events in the history of trans-continental communication technology systems (the golden spike, the golden splice, and fourth node of Arpanet), it has also become a testing ground for our environmental futures. Often these technological advances go hand-in-hand with rising environmental concerns. Utah has been the location of many

commercial data centers such as those for Twitter, eBay, and Oracle [Hu 2015, 78]. But while commercial data centers benefit from cheap water, that does not reflect its scarcity in a drought-prone state. At the same time that Utah is the site for vanguard technology development, it sits at the forefront of debates about public lands, climate change, and air quality. Our situatedness puts us into a political, environmental, technological history rife with the intersection of technological and environmental concerns. The Digital Matters logo, a simplified topographic representation of the Great Salt Lake, whose water levels are steadily declining, not only reflects local geography but recognizes an arid future (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Digital Matters branding with the Great Salt Lake topography

The lab continues to build a repertoire of critical digital research while building bridges to other entities across campus and engaging with technological issues and the environment. The work of the lab falls into the standard categories of research, instruction, and support. Rather than give a detailed description of each project, we present a broader, birds-eye view of the work that may be organizationally useful for understanding how to build a DH centers or program.

Research

As all members of the staff joined Digital Matters with their own ongoing research projects, we were committed to maintaining time for them. For example, Rebekah Cummings arrived with an active portfolio in data management and metadata studies; David Roh and Elizabeth Callaway, trained in English, had their respective ongoing monographs, in addition to their own experimental DH projects. Fortunately, around the same time the Marriott Library started emphasizing research among the tenure-track librarians, so our pursuing individual research agendas aligned with the library's strategic shift. There was no requirement for research to tie directly with Digital Matters, but the hope was that as our interests evolved in the lab environment, a natural convergence would occur. Moreover, rather than have a set percentage of time devoted to self-directed research projects, a focus on research naturally unfolded as part of the culture. For instance, at the beginning of each semester, we met to outline our goals, which not only included our commitments to Digital Matters, but our own research objectives. We could then discuss time commitments, scheduling, and workloads as book projects and articles went underwent various phases of production. Encouraging transparency not only allowed us to make room for each member, but also provided a welcome source accountability.

In addition to continuing to pursue our research agendas, we sought to engage with two types of research projects — a collaborative, multi-institutional research project of local significance, and funding faculty and graduate student projects across the four partner colleges of the College of Humanities, College of Fine Arts, College of Architecture+Planning, and the Marriott Library, guided by the broader contours of our theme, sustainability. After a few false starts, we collaborated with a local nonprofit, Better Days 2020,[7] and colleagues at Brigham Young University's Office of Digital Humanities to build an Omeka exhibit to highlight the 150th anniversary of women's suffrage in Utah, centered on the digitizing, tagging, and analysis of the *Woman's Exponent*, a nineteenth century Mormon feminist publication printed in Salt Lake City. While Utah is quick to claim its place in history as the first state in which women cast a ballot, there is more complex, nuanced story involving intersections of suffrage, polygamy, and statehood. Still in the early stages, this

project aims to produce new knowledge and speak to the wider community in Salt Lake City and Utah.

In terms of funding research projects, we offer two graduate residency fellowships and four faculty fellowships each year. This not only supports projects that otherwise might not get off the ground but also legitimizes digital scholarship across campus. In the first year offering these fellowships, our independent advisory board selected projects that engage in some way with our four-year theme of sustainability and with concerns important to Utah. Both of the Spring 2019 graduate fellows worked on digital/material art projects focusing on the environment in the west. One graduate fellow, Tiana Birrell, used her time in the Lab to map the extensive network of data centers, including the National Security Administration (NSA), in Utah and the complicated network of rivers, dams, and pipes that contribute to the cooling of those servers. A product of her research is an art installation in the Lab comprised of video projection and sculptural elements that convey the materiality and physicality of Utah's network of rivers, water, and data. A goal of her project — and the public art that accompanies it — is to prompt discussion of local environmental concerns by highlighting the significant allocation of public resources to these data centers, whose companies select Utah expressly for its "cheap" water and electricity, low seismic activity, few natural disasters, and access to an international airport. Our second inaugural graduate student fellow, Jace Brittain, explored the tension between human and animal agency through a literary aesthetic, focusing on the epidemic of bark beetles and forest decimation in Utah. By using a combination of 3D scans, prints, poetry and prose, this work speculatively makes legible the inscrutable patterns bark beetles create in boring through tree surfaces. Using digital art as a commentary on nature, global warming, and agency granted immediacy to this phenomenon, which has a tremendous effect on Utah's ecosystems yet often feels abstracted from daily life.

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Our faculty fellows' projects similarly engage with local interests, in this case, discourses of ownership of public and private bodies, and the relationship between technology and indigeneity. Faculty fellow, Dr. Wendy Wisher, developed a piece exploring the resonances between attitudes and policies toward public lands and women's reproductive rights in Utah to propose a relationship between the two. Another faculty fellow, Dr. Lourdes Alberto, created a digital archive of documents generated by social activism in diasporic indigenous communities. While not solely selected for their environmental/sustainability focus, these projects reflect the range of interests expressed in our applicant pool of faculty and students and speak to the interests of the broader Utah population.

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Instruction

Instruction ranges from workshops on tools, skills, and best-practices for faculty to semester-length courses for undergraduates. Our workshop series not only trains scholars in digital humanities tools and methods, but serves as an opportunity to strengthen our mission of being the locus for digital research on campus. Topics are decided by the community by way of surveys and polls during the planning process, and connecting with experts to lead workshops helps develop relationships. Workshops focus not only on tools, but methods and competencies; sessions on Tableau, Gephi, and Omeka might be interspersed with Data Management for the Arts and Humanities or Storytelling with Data. Tool-based workshops are possibly the most challenging activity during which to explicitly incorporate our stated commitment to digital cultural studies and sustainability, but the choice of sample datasets instructors choose to teach with often lead to critical discussions about cultural assumptions and the implications of its affordances. We have found that there are ways to build self-reflexivity into even the most tool-centered aspects of our programming.

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These skill-based workshops are complemented by the digital humanities-related undergraduate courses. The DML Director, Dr. David Roh, teaches digital humanities in the Department of English, and there are plans for experimental, project-based courses in the Honors College. Additionally, we are working with invested departments and the upper administration to implement a digital humanities certificate for undergraduates, which incorporates classes in media studies, computer science, cultural studies, as well as modules offered by the Digital Matters Lab.

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Support

In addition to supporting projects with funding, the DML also provides the space and opportunities for serendipitous encounters among researchers from different departments and disciplines beyond the partner colleges. A Research

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Interest Group (RIG) is open to all and meets regularly for events ranging from a speakers series to reading groups to works-in-progress presentations; topics covered may range from as environmental art or long-term data curation. The RIG provides occasions for regular encounters among scholars from a variety of backgrounds, which then lead to the building of a community that may result in collaborations on a given project. Informal interactions expand the circle of proficiencies that participants can draw upon when exploring research questions. Ideally, support and space results in the profile of the lab as an interdisciplinary nexus to span the entire length of the institution.

Lessons Learned

The Digital Matters Lab's launch at the University of Utah is not intended as a blueprint for other organizations to follow. If anything, we have learned that our identity, mission, and services are the direct result of our unique environment, partners, and individuals associated with the center. That said, many of the lessons we have learned mirror those of other successful digital humanities centers. In this section we have attempted to parse what lessons are broadly applicable as opposed to the more localized solutions and experiences we have chronicled above.

- Academic Partnerships/Collaboration is key. Beyond spreading risk and pooling resources, partnering with several academic partners within campus led to a sense of shared ownership and institutional investment in the DML — in our case, the College of Humanities, Fine Arts, Architecture+Planning, and the Marriott Library. Moreover, by appointing a contact person for each college — as members of the advisory board — we could ask them to represent the interests of their constituents, as well as convey our programs, projects, and mission to them — a bilateral relationship. This has the additional benefit of structurally integrating the unique strengths and foci of the university, rather than the DML venturing into areas that may not align with the strategic missions of its partners. That is not to say that having several partnerships is not without risk; the danger was that attempting to integrate conflicting interests could leave the DML rudderless or desultory. To counter committee paralysis, leadership had to take responsibility for a vision and direction while listening and integrating comments, with the understanding that s/he will not be able to please everyone.
- Lab identity should emerge organically in response to the environment. While we polled and consulted with a number of more established DH institutions, we were mindful of the fact that we would need to adapt our priorities and character to our particular placement and character. For us, this meant leveraging the existing strengths of our institution, such as game studies and history of the American West. A focus on locality also led us to select projects that speak to concerns such as water rights, public lands, air quality, and moments of local historical significance such the 150th anniversary of women's suffrage in Utah.
- Sustainability is important but we must also allow for an experimental culture where people feel allowed to fail or let projects die. With a new venture, there is an incentive to take a conservative approach; after all, we have the dual pressures of demonstrating our value to administration and figuring out a means of stretching finite resources. At the same time, much of the research may not bear fruit, or be immediately legible — and we want to allow for a culture that provides room for research that is innovative, experimental, and even risky. Taking a page from other institutions, we grant latitude for individual researchers and staff to work on their own projects, with no expectation for success or outcome other than their own intellectual fulfillment.
- There is an inherent tension between what the administration and development office want (e.g. glittery technology, such as a visualization wall) and what researchers need (e.g. human capital, flexibility, funding). [8] It has also become clear that while administrative support may be enthusiastic, there is a gap in priorities regarding their needs and the needs of the DML. For research purposes, it may be that most of the high costs come in the form of human capital — salaries for staff, researchers, and students to dedicate time for their respective projects. At the same time, funding begets funding in the sense that tangible and sleek technological apparatus may enchant and attract attention. We have to think strategically in purchasing equipment that maximizes attention and utility.
- A multi-pronged approach. Mindful as we are of the kind of argument we are attempting to make with our campus presence over the next few years, we must balance the logistics of building a tight enough portfolio

to distribute our limited bandwidth efficiently with the need to integrate ourselves into the greater campus in a way that results in a net positive. To that end, the DML facilitates workshops for undergraduate, graduate students, and faculty, consults on external projects, in addition to its own internal research.

Conclusion: Sustainable Futures?

Like many Digital Humanities centers, the future of the Digital Matters Lab is promising but uncertain, and we suspect that its fate will depend on whether we are able to make a convincing argument for its contributions on several fronts — institutionally, regionally, and nationally. With enough initial funding to last four years, the DML must make a compelling case with university administration and campus constituents for its continued existence. Our first year (2018-2019) focused on infrastructure — hiring staff, establishing identity, formalizing workflows, setting a research agenda, and creating visibility. With a small staff comprised of two faculty members and a post-doc, we juggled the responsibilities of research, teaching, and service with administrative tasks such as maintaining our website, planning events, and ordering promotional material. [33]

Our primary concern heading into the second year is sustainability and permanence. As we move out of the foundation-building phase, we begin to consider what projects, staff, relationships, and services will mark us as an indispensable campus resource. Chief in our minds are the lessons learned from previous iterations of digital scholarship centers and services on campus and nationwide. One of those lessons is that DML needs to avoid insularity and remain connected to digital scholarship efforts across campus and across Utah. DML faculty and staff will continue to provide learning and research opportunities to undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty to build a portfolio of innovative projects that speak to local concerns and our theme of sustainability. Grant opportunities will be considered and pursued when they align with the goals of the Digital Matters Lab but will not be used to maintain core staff and services. [34]

The Digital Matters Lab benefits from administrative support, five years of secure funding, and established cross-campus partnerships, but the long-term future is far from secure. We strive to cultivate the right mix of digital scholarships services, research and funding opportunities, instructional programming, and an active DH community that will be compelling to donors and administrators. Ultimately, the creation of a stable Digital Matters Lab and a permanent funding line for its staff relies on our ability to establish the DML as an invaluable hub for computationally enhanced humanities research and pedagogy, and a necessary resource at the University of Utah. [35]

Notes

[1] In 2019 the Digital Matters Advisory Board dropped the word "Lab" from our official title, making the Digital Matters Lab simply "Digital Matters." The rationale behind this decision was that Digital Matters had evolved beyond a space into a community, set of services, and opportunities like the Digital Matters Fellowship Program and Digital Matters Speaker and Workshop Series.

[2] https://games.utah.edu/

[3] https://lib.utah.edu/collections/book-arts/

[4] https://awc.utah.edu/

[5] http://www.sci.utah.edu/~nmccurdy/Poemage/

[6] http://www.songhelix.com/

[7] https://www.betterdays2020.com/

[8] David S. Roh discusses this inherent tension in "The DH Bubble: Startup Logic, Sustainability, Performativity". *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, vol. 3. Eds. Gold, Matthew and Lauren Klein. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (2019): 86-91.

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