

# Determining the Need for Library Support of Digital Humanities

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## Introduction

The Digital Humanities Task Force was convened at the request of Milner Library's Interim Dean in March 2019. The task force had faculty representation from English, history, art, philosophy, communication, and the library. The task force's charge was to investigate the current state of digital humanities at Illinois State University, determine the need for a campus-wide digital humanities initiative, and write and submit a white paper with recommendations to library administration by early Fall 2019.

## Methods

The task force performed an internal environmental scan of the University website, program assessment plans, and existing physical labs and other spaces that do or could support digital humanities initiatives. In addition, a survey was distributed twice to all University faculty through e-mail lists in Spring 2019. Twenty-two respondents said they are doing work in the digital humanities, while seventeen respondents said they are not working in the digital humanities but want to. Also, the seven task force members and six guests attended a 90-minute focus group meeting. Finally, the task force chair interviewed two faculty who were not available for the focus group meeting.

## Findings

Many respondents are currently doing research utilizing digital humanities and others are curious about how they could incorporate it as a tool in their research or teaching. Respondents recognize the need to collaborate

with others in different ways—across disciplines, as project partners or as clients who require a specific type of support or expertise—but do not feel there is a place or mechanism on campus for them to do so. Respondents seemed frustrated at the current levels of support.

Some examples of current digital humanities research are writing music through virtual reality; studying memes and digital aggression; creating and managing an open-access digital journal; coding to analyze social media content and sentiment; transcribing handwritten documents into a machine-readable format; creating a database from rare book research; mapping ownership of 17<sup>th</sup>-century artwork; analyzing digital facsimiles of medieval manuscripts; and using software like ArcGIS and MAXQDA to visualize data from historical documents.

Faculty are using digital humanities in their teaching by having students create social media advocacy campaigns, videos, interface analysis and redesigns, and data visualizations; having students do coding in HTML/CSS and rhetorical analysis; creating network-based visualizations of philosophy data to show students relationships between topics and authors; history faculty partnering with geography faculty to teach history students different technologies for original research; using unique library online collections for teaching; having students use digital projects like ESTC, EEBO, USTC, Folger Luna, and Internet Shakespeare Editions; and having students create maps of artwork and generate themed walking tours of public art grouped by theme.

## Discussion

Based on the data collected, task force members propose creating a technology-rich center located in Milner Library. Possible functions for the center include archiving and preserving digital work, providing fellowships for graduate students in the humanities (helping to make them more competitive in the job market), assisting with website design and layout, scanning, editing, proofreading, digitization, TEI, markup languages, grant writing, giving workshops or inviting experts to give them, outreach initiatives, and providing services to content providers and external clients.

## References

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