Laying the Foundation

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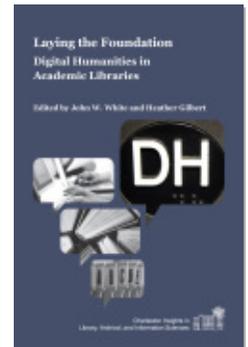Published by Purdue University Press

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Preface

Laying the Foundation[1]

This volume was inspired by a conference held at the College of Charleston in June 2014. Many of the participants in that conference, "Data Driven: Digital Humanities in the Library," are also contributors to this book; however, it is notable that the book is not the published proceedings of the conference. The essays compiled here are not simply expanded and refined versions of some of the conference presentations. Instead, they are largely a reflection of the informal conversations and serendipitous learning that truly made "Data Driven" a success. Many of the contributors were also presenters at the conference. Some of the volume's authors, such as Stewart Varner, attended the conference, but did not make a formal presentation. Others, such as Sarah Melton, were not in attendance, but were cited as influential in creating digital humanities (DH) scholarship in the library. Rather than attempting to provide little more than a transcript of the conference itself, *Laying the Foundation: Digital Humanities in Academic Libraries* is an expanded discussion of the core themes that emerged *from* the conference—namely, that the ways in which humanists organize and interact with their data is largely dependent on how that data is collected, described, and made available in academic libraries, archives, and museums.

DH practitioners utilize digital tools and innovative pedagogy to more deeply examine cultural, architectural, and historical records. A central theme of this volume is that archives, museums, and libraries provide much of the physical and virtual space where the digital humanities "happen." Therefore, it follows that the institutions that house the artifacts,

records, and digital assets that make many DH research projects possible should play a vital role in how that research is created and curated. It is with this in mind that we decided to change the title of the volume to reflect the central theme that emerged from the conference—that, at many institutions, it is libraries and librarians that maintain DH infrastructures and make learning through the digital humanities possible. Even when libraries are not the campus "home" for DH centers, it is clear that their collecting, description, and access policies have a dramatic impact on digital humanists. It is also clear, as demonstrated by several contributions to this book, that librarians can play a significant role in undergraduate instruction in the digital humanities.

Laying the Foundation is not an attempt to define the nebulous boundaries of what does and does not constitute digital humanities. Although its authors address this debate, the volume is instead intended as a conversation starter among rank-and-file librarians about how and why librarians, archivists, and museum professionals should engage with digital humanists as full partners in both research and teaching. The authors of this volume do address the differences between DH and "digital history," as well as many of the other epistemological debates raging at academic conferences, on blogs and other social media, and in the pages of refereed journals dedicated to DH scholarship. However, our primary objective is to encourage librarians to recognize, as Trevor Muñoz so eloquently argues in Chapter 1, that DH scholarship is deeply rooted in and wholly compatible with library and archival science. Collectively, its authors argue that librarians are critical partners in DH instruction and inquiry and that libraries are essential for publishing, preserving, and making accessible digital scholarship.

Laying the Foundation is organized into four sections. The first attempts to address the relationship between DH scholarship and "the library." Muñoz contends that libraries and library administrators should incorporate digital humanities "into the core conceptual equipment and the work practices of librarians." He argues that there are tangible benefits to encouraging academic inquiry among librarians—that librarians should look beyond academic work as an opportunity to provide a service and instead be full and equal partners in all that DH has to offer. Likewise, James Baker determines that the central function of libraries (to collect, catalog, and preserve knowledge) is, for both good and bad, the cornerstone

of the digital humanities. He notes that the collection and description of historiography provides source material for new methods of inquiry. Conversely, he also concludes that library practices are also often the cause of frustrating constraints for DH scholars.

The second section examines the practice of DH scholarship in the library. Katherine Rawson's contribution, for example, examines how generations of librarians and their communities have played a valuable role in preserving and making accessible a treasure trove of materials related to the study of foodways in New York. Mary Battle, Tyler Mobley, and Heather Gilbert provide a blueprint for digital libraries seeking to address the issue of silences in their collections through the careful curation of professional digital exhibits that provide a broader context for explaining underrepresented histories in archival collections. Similarly, Seth Kotch explains how the lessons learned through a generation of DH scholarship have helped shape and make more accessible the oral history collection for the Long Women's Movement at the University of North Carolina.

The third section combines the experiences of academic librarians in the development of DH centers at Emory University, the University of Kansas, and the University of Colorado Boulder. The essays by Sarah Melton and by Brian Rosenblum and Arienne Dwyer contend that library administrators can reallocate resources within existing organizations to answer campus demand for digital scholarship/humanities resources. The chapter authored by Rosenblum and Dwyer is especially adept at describing many of the unexpected pitfalls of launching a large DH center in a time of more competition for campus resources. Thea Lindquist, Holley Long, and Alexander Watkins argue that reconstructing existing DH programs within the university can generate broader and more efficient support for digital humanities scholarship in the library.

The final section is focused on pedagogy and instruction. We hope that, for many librarians, this section provides some guidance for integrating DH into library instruction. Benjamin Fraser and Jolanda-Pieta van Arnhem and also Harriet Green describe how they have fit DH instruction into existing bibliographic instruction models. Stewart Varner contends that such a reallocation of resources within the library is not so much a change of direction or consolidation, but part of the larger evolution of "digital pedagogy" in a direction that favors librarians who are well suited to engage

students and faculty in discussions focused in the areas of "digital mapping, text analysis, multimedia websites/online exhibits, and Wikipedia editing."

In the introduction to a collection of essays dedicated to DH in the *Journal of Library Administration* in January 2013, Barbara Rockenbach contended that "[l]ibraries are well positioned to support" DH because "[l]ibraries have always been places of interdisciplinary activity; places of neutrality not associated with any particular academic department."[2] As Rockenbach suggests, academic libraries are nexuses of research and technology—resources made available to students and faculty regardless of discipline or departmental affiliation. However, adding digital humanities to the core mission of the academic library requires a clear understanding of the resources and skills required. This knowledge is especially important to library administrators who routinely struggle with resource allocation in times of high demand and shrinking budgets. In our conversations with our counterparts at the "Data Driven" conference and in the pages of *Laying the Foundation*, we were pleased to find a community of librarian scholars who shared our interests and values and addressed these resource requirements head on in their own institutions. We hope that the arguments and case studies presented in the pages that follow will not only enliven the discussion of DH in the library and contribute to a burgeoning field of inquiry, but also assist librarians in their quest to lay a foundation for digital humanities research and pedagogy in their own institutions.

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NOTES

1   The editors would like to thank Amanda Noll, project coordinator of the Lowcountry Digital History Initiative. This volume would not have come together without her tireless assistance.

2   Barbara Rockenbach, "Introduction," *Journal of Library Administration* 53 (January 2013): 3.