

DIGITAL HUMANITIES AND UNDERGRADUATE LIBRARY INSTRUCTION

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Overview and Definition

A growing area of focus in academic libraries is the application of digital humanities (DH) pedagogy to undergraduate library instruction. This pedagogy infuses coursework with DH principles, that is, intersections between digital technologies and humanities methodology (Lippincott et al. 2017). Resulting assignments prompt students to examine how engagement with digital resources and technology affects their learning. While many traditional information literacy (IL) activities, such as source searching, fit the broad definition of DH pedagogy, authentic DH instruction involves taking a critical, evidence-based approach to issues and behavior surrounding the activity (Varner 2016, 206-7). For example, a source-searching lesson could include deeper reflection about search behavior and personal biases that lead to overuse (or dismissal) of specific search tools. Building an online archive might explore user experience considerations tied to archiving technology and result in student-developed metadata standards to improve searchability.

Why Do You Need to Know?

Faculty across the disciplines are increasingly incorporating DH pedagogy into their course curricula and librarians must be prepared to meet demand and develop applicable skill sets. Librarians already have considerable expertise in both technology integration and research skills, so are well-positioned to support DH-infused projects. DH pedagogy can be incorporated into a wide variety of IL and research-based assignments, creating new opportunities for librarians to collaborate with faculty on both assignment design and instruction.

As a result of these partnerships, faculty can learn about and utilize new technologies and techniques in their assignment design. Students' improved understanding of their academic and personal engagement with technology leads to better life skills (Baer 2013, 116-17). Beyond the classroom, librarians can increase their visibility on campus by engaging in discussions shaping DH, contributing their cross-disciplinary instructional experiences to the broader conversation.

Current Applications in Academic Libraries and Higher Education

Several DH projects suited to librarian involvement, adapted from Koh (2014) and White and Gilbert (2016), are highlighted here. Note: while not explicitly mentioned below, librarian expertise can always inform tool selection and technology instruction.

Digital mapping:

Digital mapping tools are used to apply layers of information to digital maps. Sample projects include adding political data to a regional map to visualize voter trends, and tracking geographic points from a novel to facilitate better understanding of the text and setting. Tools range from the expensive and steep learning curve of [Esri's ArcGIS](#) software to free/low-cost and easy-to-use web-based applications like [Google Maps](#), [HistoryPin](#), [Neatline](#), [TimeMapper](#), and [MyHistro](#).

Librarians can work with faculty to scaffold critical thinking prompts throughout assignments and identify useful digital collections. For example, archived campus images could be annotated with important events or controversies using [HistoryPin](#) to create a "historically conscious" campus tour (Varner 2016, 211). In the classroom, librarians can provide instruction on source selection and critical evaluation of information being applied to maps.

Text Analysis:

This technique, also known as "distant reading," identifies significant themes in various types of texts. Text analysis assignments can allow for critical discovery and formulation of new questions

about the work. For example, students could be asked to examine a specific book (or choose their own), use text analysis to identify common words associated with individual characters, and interpret resulting patterns. User-friendly tools include [Voyant](#) and [Textal](#) (a smartphone app) for basic word counts or data visualizations and [Mallet](#), a software toolkit, for topic modeling. Text analysis projects present many valuable collaboration opportunities. Librarians can help faculty and students identify appropriate materials from library collections and archives for use in analyses. They can also co-design assignments or IL activities focused on critical engagement with the texts.

Multimedia Websites/ Online Exhibits/ Online Publishing:

Online publishing and website tools like [WordPress](#), [Wix](#), and [Weebly](#) are useful for assignments in which students publish news stories, create a multimedia website related to a specific topic or contribute to a class blog. Online exhibits are similar but may center on work with archives and primary sources. These types of projects can utilize open source content management systems like [Omeka](#) (e.g., the [Gran Vía Madrid Digital Humanities exhibit](#)) or [Scalar](#) which are designed specifically for uploading, organizing, and spotlighting both media and textual collections.

Librarians can help select appropriate digital collections for assignments. They can also contribute to assignment design and provide instruction on applicable topics such as source evaluation, copyright best practices, [Creative Commons licensing](#), and [FERPA](#) (i.e., privacy of student data). Education in these areas helps students gain a deeper understanding of issues related to online publishing, utilizing student data, and posting of digital materials that are either self-made or created by others.

[Wikipedia Editing](#):

Editing a [Wikipedia](#) entry or group of topics related to a common theme can enhance students' engagement with an issue and highlight the importance of citation and source evaluation. Wikipedia editing projects allow students to experience first-hand the role of researcher and delve into issues such as attribution (e.g., why crediting sources is important in the context of broader scholarly conversations) and authority (e.g., who qualifies as a topic "expert" and why)

through a DH lens. Hosting a larger-scale [Wikipedia edit-a-thon](#) engages libraries with the greater academic community in tackling topics of campus-wide relevance (e.g., social justice educational leadership).

Librarian-specific teaching repositories like [Project CORA](#), [ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Sandbox](#), and [PRIMO](#) may provide helpful ideas or assignment templates. [The DiRT Directory](#) is a technology-selection aid with hundreds of useful tools for digital projects. For activities that utilize existing digital collections, assets include the Library of Congress [Digital Collections](#), [World Digital Library](#), [National Digital Library](#) and those available via institutional libraries.

Potential Hurdles

Because of the interdisciplinarity of the DH field and of undergraduate programs generally, it can be difficult to identify the programs and players who would benefit from library instruction. Even when connections are made, librarians may be met with faculty reluctant to collaborate due to the demands of learning unfamiliar tools and creating new assignments. Busy librarians may struggle to find the time required to develop expertise in new technologies, theories, and methodologies. Additional issues for libraries include lack of training, budget for resources, and general capacity for incorporating DH pedagogy into instruction programs (White and Gilbert 2016).

Conclusion

Given the challenges of engagement in this field why should librarians consider investing their time and effort? Although DH pedagogy is relatively untried in the greater library instruction community the potential for rewards, especially those linked to student learning, is significant. Students learn to work effectively in teams and become more reflective in their creation and use of digital resources. Also, there is evidence that DH pedagogy prompts more creative and experiential thinking in general approaches to problem-solving (Green 2016, 191-92). Opportunities for faculty-librarian collaboration are on the rise as DH research and instruction becomes increasingly common on college campuses. As a result, librarians can become more authentically embedded in the curriculum and liaisons can

develop more subject area expertise. Finally, librarians can benefit as learners, using DH pedagogy to improve their own knowledge of technology and critical IL instruction.

Tools Discussed

- [ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Sandbox](#)
- [ArcGIS software \(Esri\)](#)
- [DiRT Directory](#)
- [Google Maps](#)
- [HistoryPin](#)
- [Library of Congress - Digital Collections](#)
- [Library of Congress - National Digital Library](#)
- [Library of Congress - World Digital Library](#)
- [Mallet](#)
- [MyHistro](#)
- [Neatline](#)
- [Omeka](#)
- [PRIMO](#)
- [Project CORA](#)
- [Scalar](#)
- [Textal](#)
- [TimeMapper](#)
- [Voyant](#)
- [Weebly](#)
- [Wikipedia](#)
 - [Wikipedia Editing](#)
 - [Wikipedia edit-a-thon](#)
- [Wix](#)
- [WordPress](#)

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Further Readings

- [DH+LIB: Where the Digital Humanities and Librarianship Meet \(blog\)](#)
- [The Digital Humanities Resource Guide \(CUNY Academic Commons\)](#)
- [Digital Humanities Tools & Tutorials \(College of Charleston\)](#)
- [A Guide to Digital Humanities \(Northwestern University\)](#)