

## CONFIGURATION AND SUPPORT MODELS FOR HUMANITIES COMPUTING

Suggestions from Geoffrey Rockwell, McMaster University  
(<http://www.geoffreyrockwell.com/>)

Personally I think the types of centers break down into the following:

- a. **Project-based centers** whose primary purpose is to support a project or cluster of projects
- b. **Institutes with Fellows** - IATH at Virginia and MITH and Maryland would be examples of institutes that allocate resources to a couple of fellows a year - these are awarded competitively. There is a lot to say for this model - it allows you to fairly allocate limited resources while still supporting ambitious projects. It also means that colleagues get rewarded for participating.
- c. **Service centers** that provide research, instructional and administrative support to the Faculty of Humanities. Our Humanities Media and Computing here at McMaster would be an example. They run labs for students, they have an AV library, they service the computers of the dean and chairs, and they support research and instructional computing in various ways.

Regarding the hiring - hiring your own people has pros and cons:

**Pros** - people seconded have a way of not really doing what you want. They often end up finishing someone else's tasks first. Hiring your own makes clear who they answer to and lets you get someone who understands the humanities.

**Cons** - Hiring is time-consuming and you then have to supervise. Make sure you are given release for administration. If you haven't hired computing staff before then get someone who has to join you.

[...]

We don't have any development staff in the sense of programmers who build projects. Development is what faculty have to get from grants - we provide the rest. The moment you offer to build things for people you open a black hole of desire. You need to be VERY careful of the following:

1. **You are perceived as giving programming to some and not others.** That is why, if you allocate it you need to allocate it either through a competition or through some other open process. And ... there is never enough programming support.
2. **Those that you build for don't appreciate it.** I don't know why, but we academics have little respect for free services. If I offer a free workshop half the people who sign up won't show. If I ask people to pay a token amount they all show up. Likewise, if I provide development to a senior colleague for free they don't take it seriously - they don't appreciate the hard work and they don't do their part. If I make them pay in some way then the situation changes.
3. **Projects never finish.** Even if you tell someone they have a developer for X amount of time, they always want more because their project always needs just one more tweak. Then you end up in the situation where you either have to cut them off or you never get to help anyone else.

All three models above solve these problems in different ways. Project centers just don't try to be fair. Institutes use competition to award support, and support centers offer everyone access up to a certain level.

If you want to come up for a visit and a tour before I leave (beginning of July) please drop me a line. Sometimes seeing helps.

The **library** is an interesting player. IATH at UVA and MITH at Maryland are both in the Library. We are a Faculty child and are only now working out a relationship with the Library. My view of where we want to be is the following, in terms of research projects:

- a. The library runs the repositories into which we put scholarly data along with metadata. They maintain the repositories and run them in a way that allows us to create applications.
- b. We run the projects that create the scholarly data (TEI XML encoded texts, scans of manuscripts, papers, ...) and push it into a Library-run repository. We also build the publishing, research and instructional applications that "check out" the documents from the repositories for use.

Technically this is a matter of the library running a server with Fedora and working with your programmers so that you run a server with the application that users see where they ask for a document, search it ... and so on.

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## Resources

### Institutional models for humanities computing

<http://www.allc.org/imhc/>

### Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations

<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/>

### Archives of listserv discussion on HUMANIST

<http://www.princeton.edu/~mccarty/humanist/>

### Digital Humanities Wiki

*an ongoing attempt to derive a basic typology from a complex variety of activities and so to provide institutional models for the field [of digital humanities]*

<http://digitalhumanities.pbwiki.com/Centers>

### centerNet

*an international network of [digital humanities](#) centers formed for cooperative and collaborative action that will benefit digital humanities and allied fields in general, and centers as humanities cyberinfrastructure in particular. It developed from a meeting hosted by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the University of Maryland, College Park, April 12-13, 2007 in Washington, D.C., and is a response to the American Council of Learned Societies report on Cyberinfrastructure for the Humanities and Social Sciences, published in 2006*

<http://www.digitalhumanities.org/centernet/>