

DIGITAL HUMANITIES INITIATIVE

As part of UB2020 strategic planning, we propose to showcase campus strengths in literary and historical studies by launching a **Digital Humanities Initiative** which will combine a structure of scholarly exchange and an infrastructure of technological access. The DHI will sustain faculty already engaged in digital humanities projects and will expose other faculty to the scholarly, intellectual, and creative possibilities opened up by such technology and infrastructure. Although the focus of this initiative is the humanities as rather narrowly conceived, we are enthusiastic about partnerships with scholars in arts computing and in relevant social science and scientific disciplines. The proposed initiative will create a significant vortex of energy, potentially transforming the research capacities and directions of several faculty and generating an exciting level of intellectual and collaborative exchange. This initiative will also have significant positive impact on graduate recruitment, especially if training workshops and research assistantships (AY and summer) can be made regularly available.

RATIONALE

John Unsworth, among others, has proposed a functional definition of humanities computing, “in which the computer is used as tool for modeling humanities data and our understanding of it” (“What is Humanities Computing and What is Not?” <<http://computerphilologie.uni-muenchen.de/jg02/unsworth.html>>). Understood in this way, the enterprise is no longer one which requires elaborate justification – after all, every academic discipline has been radically transformed by the application of computing technologies over the last three decades. The question is rather how the humanities should engage in a similar transformation, and more specifically, how UB can join the ranks of institutions already embarked on this enterprise.

The advances made by peer (and lesser) institutions might ordinarily suggest that humanities computing is not an area in which UB can hope to achieve national prominence. However, many factors encourage a more optimistic view:

- UB has a superb computing **infrastructure**, including internationally recognized supercomputing facilities
- UB’s **intellectual assets** in both computing and in the humanities are highly regarded
- UB and the community have unique **material assets** in the humanities which lend themselves to digital projects (such as unedited archival collections)
- UB faculty have an **interdisciplinary outlook** and receptivity to the knowledge and methods of a variety of disciplines
- UB’s **proximity to the Canadian border** will facilitate collaborations with the highly advanced Canadian network of humanities computing specialists
- UB digital humanities projects have won **outside grant funding**
- a **critical mass of UB faculty** are now engaged in humanities computing projects and keen to institutionalize their collective efforts so as to bring maximum benefit to students and faculty

A Digital Humanities Initiative will strengthen the institution in the following ways:

- It will promote and require **collaborative work** in fields which have traditionally prized only solitary scholarship, and will thereby enrich and stimulate scholarly exchange and increase the competitiveness of individual projects for external funding

- It will broaden the mission of the **Humanities Institute** and expand its prospects for external funding
- It will improve the **intellectual climate** and thereby function as a **retention tool** for faculty and students
- It will create opportunities for **faculty-student research collaborations** in fields where such opportunities have traditionally been lacking
- It will enhance UB's reputation as a **center of excellence in the humanities**, and a place other scholars will want to visit as a model for developmental programs at their own institutions as well as because of its particular archival, technical, and faculty/scholarly resources.

PLANS AND OBJECTIVES

The objective of the DHI will be to provide a material and intellectual infrastructure for humanities computing research and development such that, within a decade, UB humanities computing projects regularly receive external funding, attract and retain graduate students and faculty, and are cited as exemplary by peer reviewers. To achieve these objectives, we endorse the following plans, some of which have been enacted:

- Mobilize interested faculty and submit a request for internal funding through IRDF in the office of the Vice President for Research;
- Schedule the projected first steps using alternative funding (NEH, English, RLL): Julia Flanders, who received a substantial NEH grant to train faculty and graduate researchers in use of XML and other mark-up languages for research in the Humanities, will lead a training workshop at UB, January 8-10. This workshop will be open to 25 faculty and/or graduate students, with preference given to UB faculty and students in the humanities;
- Consult the leadership of the Humanities Institute to assess their interest in incubating a digital humanities initiative;
- Schedule two fall-semester brown bag discussions to enable all interested faculty to talk about current projects and to brainstorm about how a digital humanities initiative might most fruitfully serve individual and institutional needs;
- Plan two symposia for the spring semester, following up on the Flanders XML workshop, in which current UB faculty give work-in-progress reports on their own uses of mark-up/interactive technologies in humanities research.

GOVERNANCE

The long-term governance structure of the DHI should be negotiated by stake-holders, including the leadership of the Humanities Institute, representatives from the Dean's Office, department chairs, and faculty engaged in digital humanities projects. In the interim, we propose a steering committee to consist of Associate Dean Bruce Pitman, the chairs of English and Romance Languages, and an officer of the Humanities Institute.

ANNUAL BUDGET

Item	Quantity	Cost	Total
GA stipends for graduate students to assist faculty engaged in research using mark-up languages	2	\$13,000	\$26,000
Training workshops for graduate students and faculty	2	\$750	\$1,500
Server space adequate for development and production; server support ¹		\$0	\$0
Specialized technical support by a staff member fully conversant with the technologies and their applicability to humanities research ²	0.25	\$50,000	\$12,500
Semester-long faculty research leaves	2	\$7,000	\$14,000
Grant writer	0.25	\$50,000	\$12,500
Visiting Faculty Fellow	0.5	\$60,000	\$30,000
Software licenses	20	\$100	\$2,000
Membership in consortia and professional organizations	2	\$200	\$400
TOTAL			\$98,900

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

"Is Humanities Computing an Academic Discipline?" An Interdisciplinary Seminar at the University of Virginia (1999-2000): <<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/hcs/>> (31.10.2002).

Willard McCarty and Matthew Kirschenbaum: "Institutional Models for Humanities Computing." <<http://www.allc.org/imhc/>> (31.10.2002).

Willard McCarty: We Would Know How We Know What We Know. Responding to the Computational Transformation of the Humanities. <<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/humanities/cch/wlm/essays/know/know.html>> (31.10.2002).

¹ Server capacity on the NEH-supplied Lit/loss server should be more than adequate for short-term / medium-term needs.

² There is a possibility that this function could be met by a librarian on staff at UB.

Tito Orlandi: The Scholarly Environment of Humanities Computing. A Reaction to Willard McCarty's talk on *The Computational Transformation of the Humanities*.
 <<http://RmCisadu.let.uniroma1.it/~orlandi/mccarty1.html>> (31.10.2002).

Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC)
 <<http://www.hastac.org/>>

National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Start-up Grants
 <<http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/digitalhumanitiesstartup.html>>

National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Fellowships
 <<http://www.humanities.gov/grants/guidelines/dhfellowships.html>>

National Science Foundation Digital Libraries Initiative
 <<http://www.dli2.nsf.gov/>>

Stanford Humanities Center Digital Humanities Fellowship
 <http://shc.stanford.edu/fellowships/digital_hum.htm>

Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Maryland
 <<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/>>

Electronic Text Center at the University of Virginia
 <<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/>>

Research in Computing for the Humanities at the University of Kentucky
 <<http://www.rch.uky.edu/>>