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Bridging the Divide: Improving Digital Humanities Pedagogy by Networking Higher Education and Secondary Education Faculty in St. Louis

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In 2021, faculty at Lindenwood University and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) led the formation of a Saint Louis Digital Humanities (STL DH) Network of faculty and scholars at area universities, schools, and cultural institutions.¹ The Lindenwood and SIUE campuses bookend the St. Louis metro area, a region whose strong geospatial presence offers fruitful opportunities for digital humanities (DH) education but which also suffers from long, deeply ingrained economic and racial segregation. While other regional DH networks exist, the STL DH Network is unique in taking undergraduate education and secondary education—and particularly equitable access to education—as its chief focus. Most DH networks are led by scholars at research universities and exist primarily to support the work of faculty and graduate students, and only secondarily (if at all) to support the learning of undergraduates or high school students. In contrast, the STL DH Network’s earliest members were faculty at institutions with teaching-focused missions, and they are working to imagine and develop a DH network in service of those missions and of the St. Louis community at large.

Creating a new DH network that centres undergraduate and high school student learning comes with special challenges. The guidance that can be obtained from studying other DH networks is fairly limited, as there have only been a few efforts to network DH scholars at institutions with teaching-focused missions (and with the limited resources that such institutions usually have). In 2014, for instance, the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries and the University of Pennsylvania hosted a conference on using special collections in K–12 and college classrooms, including case studies featuring digital tools and methods (Herbison and Farrington). Another project, also launched in 2014, networked rural high school English instructors in Grays Harbor County, Washington, identifying resource gaps affecting access to DH education and developing recommendations for improvement (Arteaga). More recently, the Digital Humanities Collaborative of North Carolina, which includes high school teachers among its executive board and membership, presented at DH2020 on cultivating a radically inclusive DH and explicitly addressed a variety of institutional contexts (Kelber et al.). In addition to these DH networks that engage with K–12 institutions, the work of Anne B. McGrail with community colleges (17–19), Roopika Risam with regional comprehensive universities (“Networking” 2), and Pamela R. Lach and Jessica Pressman in linking institutions across the whole spectrum of higher education in a single region (197–199) have provided valuable models for creating inclusive, pedagogy-centred collaborations. Other scholars have examined the necessity for (and challenges to) building human infrastructure with limited resources (Simon 255–256). However, these projects are more the exception than the rule. As Risam herself has noted, most of the scholarship on the digital humanities emerges from research universities; consequently, “the scholarship that attends to the infrastructural dimensions of digital humanities does so with these universities and their libraries in mind” (“Stewarding Place” 304). To move the conversation on DH pedagogy forward, we need more scholarship attending to the practice of DH at K–12 and under-resourced higher education institutions.

As the STL DH Network works to establish infrastructures that support DH pedagogy across the secondary and undergraduate levels, one of its chief priorities is developing a framework that accounts for both St. Louis’s local contingencies and contributes to broader discourses in the field of DH pedagogy. In 2022, the Network received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Missouri Humanities Council to work toward addressing these challenges. These grants were awarded to support collaborative efforts aimed at making the St. Louis area a leader in DH education at the high school and undergraduate levels by drawing together teachers from diverse institutions across the metro area to share their experiences in local classrooms and communities. The Missouri Humanities Council supported the first of these efforts, the Improving Digital Humanities Pedagogy in St. Louis workshop, in April 2022. Three higher education faculty members facilitated discussions with five St. Louis–area high school faculty members about how to increase and improve the teaching of DH in high schools and how higher ed and secondary ed faculty can support each other in this effort. The results of these discussions will be used to guide the STL DH Network’s future activities. We present these findings here as an aid to other scholars and DH advocates interested in working across the higher education–secondary education divide.

Literature Review

Much has been made of the skills (or lack thereof) of current and future generations of students. While the paradigm of the “digital native” has been rightfully challenged, students’ lives are inundated with technologies that they are not fully equipped to interrogate and use critically (Christian-Lamb and Shrout, pars. 5–9; Locke, pars. 3–4). Meanwhile, the world of business into which they will soon enter is changing rapidly under these same technological pressures. The education we provide students needs to recognize and respond to these pressures, to help students comprehend and gain agency in their interactions with the technologies that shape their world. No field is better positioned to do so than DH. In *Digital Humanities*, an influential survey of the state of the field published in 2012, a group of scholars identified the following set of student learning outcomes that DH is particularly suited to helping students achieve, especially in comparison with “traditional classroom-based humanities pedagogy”:

1. “Ability to integrate digitally driven research goals, methods, and media with discipline-specific inquiry,”
2. “Ability to understand, analyze, and use data,”
3. “Develop critical savvy for assessing sources and data,”
4. “Ability to use design critically,”
5. “Ability to assess information and information technologies critically,” and
6. “Ability to work collaboratively.” (Burdick et al. 134).

While elements of these outcomes are commonly taught in other courses in the humanities (and in the sciences, for that matter), DH provides a unique integration of critical inquiry, data use, facility with a variety of media and technologies, and collaboration—a crucial combination in many of today’s service-sector jobs. More recent research has shown quantitatively that DH projects aid students in achieving these outcomes. For

instance, one of the most popular forms of DH work to assign to students is digital storytelling. A review of 57 studies about digital storytelling assignments in primary, secondary, and higher education found considerable evidence of positive effects across a wide range of learning outcomes including technical skills, learning attitudes, collaboration and communication skills, critical thinking, and others (Wu and Chen 6–7).

DH's support for developing collaboration skills is particularly valuable because traditional humanities pedagogy places more emphasis on independent work. DH's inherently interdisciplinary nature can help humanities students learn to perform in collaborative, team-based environments that are the norm in many of today's jobs. DH can also help students in the humanities see the value of their skills in contexts outside of traditional humanistic study as they prepare to go on the job market (and it can be an entry point *into* the humanities for students in STEM fields). However, the importance of the skills DH develops in students should not be reduced to their value in the job market. Even more important is how such skills help students discover their own interests, develop their ability to communicate and connect with others, and navigate a digitally mediated world. Given the mounting evidence of the value of DH in education, scholars such as Kara Kennedy have suggested that teaching DH is becoming an ethical obligation: "Ultimately, if the incorporation of DH tools and methods into humanities classrooms helps teachers prepare students to be more critically informed and engaged in the digital environment of the 21st-century information society, it becomes the ethical choice" (par. 43). Similar views are beginning to appear in the K–12 world as well, such as the appeal made by Tom Liam Lynch in the pages of *The English Journal* of the National Council of Teachers of English in 2016, in which he argues that DH approaches empower students who live in a world of software (112).

With evidence of the value of DH to humanities education accumulating, scholars have begun to take an active interest in DH pedagogy. As recently as 2012, Brett D. Hirsch and Stephen Brier simultaneously and independently identified a crisis of DH pedagogy—what Hirsch referred to as the "bracketing" of pedagogy and Brier as the relegation of pedagogy to afterthought (Hirsch 5; Brier 390–391). In the same year, *Hybrid Pedagogy*, a journal of critical digital pedagogy, launched its first issue with a call to reimagine teaching and "engage our students at the level of 1s and 0s but also at the level of flesh" (Stommel). In the last decade, the field of DH pedagogy has grown immensely in size and includes a wealth of books, articles (and indeed entire journals), and conferences dedicated to the subject. It has broadened its scope as well from graduate students (who were long the primary beneficiaries of DH pedagogy and training) to tackle undergraduate, secondary, and even grade school contexts. This work provides a strong foundation for the holistic approach to DH pedagogy imagined by the STL DH Network.

Undergraduate education has especially benefited from increased attention to DH pedagogy. A special issue of *Digital Humanities Quarterly* in 2017, edited by Emily Christina Murphy and Shannon R. Smith, explored dimensions of the DH undergraduate, focusing on three pillars of student agency, multiple literacies, and challenges of scale (par. 5). The Digital Humanities and the Undergraduate Experience Conference, organized in 2019 by SIUE's IRIS Center, extended those discussions to consider the multiple contexts of undergraduates

in DH, theoretical frameworks for DH pedagogy, and practical tutorials for creating and using classroom resources (DeSpain et al., *Digital Humanities*).

Scholars have likewise begun to formulate the challenges and opportunities of digital humanities in the secondary classroom. In 2018, for instance, a roundtable at the DH2018 conference explored *Digital Humanities in Middle and High School: Case Studies and Pedagogical Approaches* (Gil et al.). Bringing together practitioners from middle and high schools and scholars engaged in teacher training, the roundtable considered both the specific needs of secondary students and curricula, as well as opportunities for collaboration across the high school–college divide. While acknowledging the rich potential for development of literacies through digital humanities, the roundtable participants sought to move beyond skills acquisition to “enable students to envision a relationship between themselves and knowledge production” (Gil et al.). As participants acknowledged, bringing this vision of a transformative digital humanities pedagogy to life comes with numerous associated challenges, including curriculum, access to resources, and stakeholder buy-in. Moreover, these general challenges are compounded by systemic and infrastructural problems in specific locales. As Arteaga has argued, DH can make a meaningful intervention in discussions of access to scholarship and to technological resources, but it does not do so inherently. Arteaga’s critical engagement with the vocabulary of “digital” and “public” humanities in the context of secondary education challenges the field to interrogate its relationship and contributions to the communities with which it engages.

Despite these and other rich contributions to scholarship, barriers to DH access persist across both the secondary and undergraduate contexts and have in many cases been compounded by the pandemic, by political challenges to high school teachers and curricula, and by funding and personnel limitations. Much DH engagement in secondary classrooms continues to be project-based and reliant on grant funding, and further discussions about sustainable infrastructures and ethical models of engagement are necessary.

The relative undiscoverability of tangible resources like syllabi, assignments, and activities circulated around diffuse networks has been mitigated but not resolved by repositories like Humanities Commons. Access to such materials is a familiar problem across teaching fields, but for digital humanists it is compounded by continual cycles of updates, obsolescence, and new tools and technologies (Dombrowski 84). This is also a problem of labour wrapped up in soaring rates of precarity (Bretz, par. 8). Even when repositories facilitate discovery, the production of new, up-to-date teaching materials requires a substantial body of active practitioners who are accorded adequate time, compensation, and access to resources to produce those materials.

We must also acknowledge the unfortunate reality that, despite the well-documented pedagogical value of DH, the digital world often reinforces the inequities that exist outside of it. Such inequities are evident in the digital humanities, the practice of which disproportionately still takes place at elite higher education institutions (Risam, “Stewarding Place” 304–305). While the expense of hardware and software is partly responsible for these inequities, they are also produced by more insidious forces. The rhetoric and socialization surrounding

the humanities often positions their study as irrelevant to everyday concerns and thus the purview of a privileged few (Kent 275). Also, many humanities students, particularly women and students of colour, believe they lack the technical skills or knowledge necessary to begin DH work (Kennedy, pars. 10–13). Most harmfully, the field of DH has a history of racist and exclusionary practices (Rambsy 152–153; McPherson 152). These concerns are of particular relevance to the St. Louis region, where historical and contemporary pressures have resulted in stark inequalities and sharp lines of economic and racial segregation (Daché et al. 2). Thus, investment in and access to technology, skills training, and digital literacies are unevenly distributed across the region.

Several projects are demonstrating ways toward a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable DH field. Many of them share common traits: (1) a federated or networked model that equitably distributes, attributes, and compensates labour; (2) active engagement with those whom the field and academia writ large have historically excluded, especially scholars of colour; (3) the prioritization of culturally representative content; and (4) the creation of equitable infrastructures and resources (including open-access scholarship, training and pedagogical materials, and funding opportunities) that reduce barriers to entry into DH. The Recovery Hub for American Women Writers, for instance, supports scholars working in digital textual recovery scholarship by offering services like consultation, project cultivation, and peer review that are often difficult to access for scholars with limited or no institutional resources. Central to the Recovery Hub’s mission is the “explor[ation] of the intersecting relationships between feminist practice, content, and technical specifications with an awareness of the ways that the design and implementation of technology can exclude and objectify people” (DeSpain et al., “Mission”). Likewise, the Caribbean Digital Scholarship Collective (CDSC) offers training, funding, conferences, and other opportunities to support scholars of Caribbean Studies, with a particular emphasis on pedagogical programs. Embedded in the CDSC mission is an awareness of the intersections between past and present injustices and the role of scholarship beyond the academy. Community-oriented scholarship “is all the more urgent as the Caribbean and the planet face unprecedented challenges of anthropogenic climate change, forced migrations, racial and ethnic clashes, and the (consequent) loss of valuable historical records” (Glover et al.). The Recovery Hub, the CDSC, and the growing number of projects like them thus articulate the crucial need for a just DH pedagogy that actively welcomes and invites in practitioners and students who have been historically excluded—a critical need felt across all our constituent communities.²

Project Description

It was out of a recognition of both the value of DH to students and the current inequitable distribution of access to DH education at the undergraduate and high school levels that the STL DH Network was established. Our first formal effort to begin addressing these inequities was the Improving Digital Humanities Pedagogy in St. Louis workshop. The workshop, which took place on the Lindenwood University campus in April 2022,

brought together higher education and secondary education faculty to investigate how collaborations between the two could improve DH pedagogy at both levels.

As such, the workshop was designed as a mutual learning experience: the university faculty shared their knowledge of recent trends in DH activities and pedagogy in higher education, and the high school faculty shared their knowledge of high school instructional standards, digital teaching methods, and institutional needs. By having open conversations with each other on the subject of DH instruction in St. Louis, the workshop identified how that instruction can be improved through greater cooperation between high school and college educators. That cooperation might take a variety of shapes, and workshop participants emphasized in particular the value of providing models, exempla, and teaching resources. The project director was Jeremy Carnes, an associate professor of English at Lindenwood University. He facilitated the workshop with the help of Margaret K. Smith, a research assistant professor of digital humanities at SIUE, and Tara Vansell, an instructor of geography at Lindenwood University.

The pandemic presented an early and severe challenge to recruitment. While we had a budget to provide honoraria to seventeen secondary education faculty, recruiting difficulties and last minute cancellations ultimately led to only five faculty participating in the workshop. This was a significant disappointment, as we wished to have a broad range of perspectives and voices at the workshop. According to many of the faculty and administrators we spoke with during our months of advertising the event, secondary education faculty were exhausted from the tolls that COVID-19 had taken (and was still taking) on their schools. Even as schools open up, this challenge will likely persist: the teacher shortage crisis playing out across much of the US suggests that faculty exhaustion may remain even as the pandemic subsides. Other possible reasons for faculty reluctance to engage in this project (or any endeavour to include more DH in high school curricula) were raised by the participants themselves, as we shall discuss below. While our low participation rate was unfortunate, the participants who did attend were an extremely knowledgeable and engaged group that represented both public and private schools and came from both St. Louis City and St. Louis County (a geographical boundary that often mirrors demographic boundaries).

The day of the workshop was broken up into a series of sessions, focused on (1) sharing current DH practices in the high school classroom, (2) demonstrating some DH tools and practices that can be easily incorporated into the high school classroom, (3) challenges to, and opportunities for, performing more DH in high schools, (4) obstacles (institutional or otherwise) to allowing high school students to participate in university-based DH projects, and (5) developing a set of priorities for the STL DH Network to pursue in order to improve DH pedagogy at the secondary education level.

Findings

Current DH Practices in the High School Classroom

To ensure that everyone at the workshop shared a similar idea of what “digital humanities” is, at the outset of the workshop the facilitators shared and discussed with the participants the following definition of DH: “The digital humanities is an umbrella term for approaches to humanistic inquiry that rely upon digital technologies, and for the humanistic inquiry into digital technologies and how they shape human culture.” This definition is a broad one, for several reasons. First, over the years, much ink has been spilled trying to define DH in narrower terms, and while some aspects of that conversation have been productive, other aspects have smacked of gatekeeping (see Nowvskie). We believe a broader definition better supports goals of diversity and inclusivity in the field. Second, working across the high school–college divide comes with a lot of unavoidable challenges, and we did not wish to add to those challenges by using a complicated or narrow definition. Third, we believe that a definition that includes both digital tool and media use *and* the interrogation of digital tools and media helps to highlight the variety of skills DH can develop in students, ranging from concrete, practical skills to more cognitive and reflective ones. Inclusion of the latter skills gives instructors who may not feel very comfortable using digital tools themselves an entry point into the DH conversation. Finally, we believed that the term “digital humanities” was unlikely to have much currency among high school instructors, and so in this definition (as well as in our advertisements of the event and in other communications with participants prior to the workshop) we used language that we believed the instructors would recognize as reflected in the work they do (i.e., “working with digital tools,” “developing students’ digital literacy,” etc.). With regard to this last point, at the workshop our participants confirmed our suspicions: only two of them had ever heard of “digital humanities” before, all of them acknowledged that the term had little or no currency at their schools, and they agreed that our future efforts at outreach to high school instructors should continue to explain our network’s goals in more familiar terms.

A pre-workshop survey showed participants’ strongest interest was in demonstrations and peer learning, so we dedicated the morning to these activities and discussion about various approaches to teaching DH. Participants’ experience with using digital tools in the classroom varied considerably. Most participants’ experience was primarily with using tools that gamify learning (such as [Blooket](#), [Kahoot!](#), and [Nearpod](#)) or with tools that encourage student interaction and engagement online (discussion boards and [Flipgrid](#)) or aid in content creation ([WeVideo](#)). One participant made extensive use of very technical tools, such as working in Visual Basic, developing a virtual version of the city of Rome using the [Neverwinter Nights](#) game design tools, and leading students in a project to digitize old high school yearbooks.

The participants shared some specific lessons and projects they had taught that had leveraged digital tools to increase student engagement and learning. A few key points emerged from these discussions. All of the participants agreed that digital literacy for the next generation will likely require some basic knowledge of HTML and other coding languages. It is often assumed that the “digital native” generation is more adept with technology than their elders, but in many cases young people lack familiarity with aspects of digital work that

the previous generation takes for granted. A lot of foundational teaching is necessary before students can engage with command lines and directory structures, for instance.

It is worth noting as well that, while these teachers were (by process of self-selection) very far from taking any kind of Luddite view of digital technologies, they cautioned against the fetishizing of digital tools, or in the words of one participant, against “focus[ing] on tech for tech’s sake.” They agreed that there is nothing inherently superior about digital methods. A tool is only as useful as the questions you ask *with* it, and the questions you ask *of* it.

Responses to Tools/Practices Demonstrated by Facilitators

The workshop facilitators provided brief demonstrations of a number of DH tools or activities that they had used effectively in university classrooms. Demonstrations included two Esri Geographic Information System (GIS) tools, [GeoInquiries](#) and [StoryMaps](#); digital storytelling in the form of [Twine](#) games, [TimelineJS](#), and video editing; and digital exhibit curation using [Omeka](#). Participant discussion about these tools and activities was quite positive, but also brought into focus a concern that high school teachers are likely to have about these tools: some of the more data-focused tools do not seem like they have much to do with the humanities at first glance. However, when you frame the work you are doing with the data as a form of storytelling, the humanistic relevance comes into focus. As one participant put it, the humanities is about “asking the big questions.” Data can provide some answers to those questions, but data does not speak for itself. DH helps students interrogate data through a humanistic lens and see how the use of data is a form of storytelling.

The DH activities that generated the most interest were those connected with GIS, for a number of reasons. One was curricular: StoryMaps offers clear connections to humanistic approaches and existing course content and a clear path for deeper engagement between technological and humanistic content and skills. Another was practical: Esri GIS tools are used by professionals yet free to educators, making them especially appealing as a source of practical experience. Finally, mapping capitalizes on local priorities. St. Louis is home to the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, and the city has broader ambitions to be a national hub for geospatial technology, so GIS technology may be of particular relevance to the students of our region. Such regional considerations could help to engage faculty who would otherwise be less interested in employing DH tools in class.

As an additional valuable outcome of this discussion, participants confirmed that tools and activities such as these could be clearly aligned with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MoDESE) standards. To take just one example, a StoryMaps assignment could be designed to serve both a Grade 9–12 American History standard requiring that students have the ability to “[c]reate and use maps and other graphic representations in order to explain relationships and reveal patterns or trends in United States’ history c.1870–2010” and a Grade 9–10 English Language Arts standard requiring that students have the ability to “[u]se technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing

products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically” (6–12 *Social Studies* 5; 6–12 *English Language Arts* 16). And these are merely some of the standards where the affordances of StoryMaps would particularly enhance student learning; a StoryMaps project (or a Twine or Omeka project) could easily serve many other standards. English Language Arts standards covering matters such as organizing, composing, and revising written work do not specify that student work be produced in a particular medium or form. Recognizing that MoDESE standards are written broadly enough to be inclusive of DH approaches to student learning resolved one potential obstacle to greater adoption of DH practices.

Obstacles to Increasing DH Practices in High Schools

In the afternoon, we shifted from a focus on the classroom and assignments to broader reflections on the future that DH could have in St. Louis high schools. The facilitators first asked the participants to reflect on the obstacles (institutional, curricular, financial, etc.) limiting greater adoption of DH practices in high school classrooms. Perhaps the biggest concern noted by participants is how often technology changes. Projects lose funding, tools lose support, communities move on, and a technology that an instructor has invested a lot of time into learning how to teach becomes defunct. The most precious resource is time, and with everything else teachers have to do, it is a big ask for them to invest time in learning a tool that may prove ephemeral. Instructors might therefore be most willing to invest time in either extremely simple technologies that require little upkeep and self-education or technologies that are supported by major corporations and thus (in theory) less likely to lose support. This issue is closely related to another that the group highlighted: technology proliferation. The sheer number of tools and platforms available to instructors can be daunting to someone trying to get started. These issues are not easy to resolve because DH scholars tend to value open source tool options. In this respect, there is a meaningful divide in priorities between secondary and higher education faculty that deserves greater attention.

The obstacles noted above are intensified for new teachers. While we might think recent college graduates would be best positioned to make use of the latest digital tools, the first few years of teaching are exhausting, and creativity is often sacrificed as the teacher focuses on developing their baseline skills as an instructor. New instructors are less likely to have time for additional training in digital tools.

Due to the pandemic, our teachers had experience teaching online, and they noted that (perhaps counterintuitively) it actually became harder to use digital tools in online classrooms. Lack of home internet access and technical issues were common. Being in an in-person classroom is no guarantee of access, however. Some schools in the area are not yet “one-to-one,” i.e., there is not a computer for every student. In such situations, teachers need to schedule computer use. Bandwidth limitations can also make certain online activities difficult.

One of the advantages of DH is that students can do authentic projects engaging with real-world issues. The downside to this authenticity is that sometimes real projects fail—even if you do everything right. Such failure needs to be managed, especially for students who are very concerned about their grades. For projects that can fail, assessments need to be designed so that the failure of the project does not translate into a bad grade. A focus on process over results can help mitigate this issue. A major component of a project should be a final reflection in which the student assesses the project’s process and results, including where things did not go according to plan.

Supports for Practising DH in High Schools

After our discussion of obstacles, we shifted to discussing *supports* (current or potential) for practising DH in high schools. The participants agreed that school administrations have a major role to play in this regard. While faculty generally have the freedom to implement DH activities on their own, they do need some cooperation from administrators. Websites are often blocked on school computers, and some tools require admin permission, for instance. But the biggest role administrations have to play is cultural. Administrative encouragement of DH activities would help generate faculty buy-in—if that encouragement is sustained over a long period of time. Participants expressed that in the short-term, many faculty are likely to be skeptical of such encouragement, as most of them will have prior experiences of administrators launching a new project or endeavour only to move on to something new after a year or two. It will therefore take persistence and a genuine cultural change (with the associated resources and supports) for an administrative push in support of DH to result in widespread faculty buy-in.

Thus, while conversations with school administrators should take place, higher education faculty interested in aiding the adoption of DH practices in high schools would do well to give attention to the teaching taking place at their *own* institutions, in their colleges of education. One path forward is to strengthen DH pedagogy in teacher education courses so that prospective teachers can have a foundation in DH instruction by the time they reach the classroom. As for teachers who have already left college, colleges can organize workshops designed to help them get started with DH practices. The participants suggested that the STL DH Network could provide a crucial support in the form of a workshop series and/or recorded lessons. The network might begin by reaching out to principals and curriculum/instruction leaders at schools, as they could help identify what training would be most valuable and encourage faculty participation. Finally, building and strengthening relationships between the higher education institution and the local school/community is important for buy-in, community development and support, and for addressing the particular needs of the school/community.

High School Student Participation in DH Projects

One of the goals of the next planned workshop in the STL DH Network’s series is to develop a process that will allow students at area high schools to participate (remotely or in-person) in DH projects hosted at colleges or universities. Participants agreed that this goal is desirable and feasible. High schools are, of course, very

interested in students getting real-world experience that work on such projects would provide. Moreover, some area high schools have internship options that could form the basis of a process by which students could get school credit for participation on a remote project. That said, logistics are always complicated for a student performing work outside the high school campus. Facilitating extracurricular digital humanities experiences will require numerous considerations, from mechanisms for earning credit to access to hardware and software, along with thornier issues of student safety and responsible supervision by postsecondary faculty, many of whom lack formal training in pedagogy. Participants agreed that in the first instance, forming a strong relationship between the university and the high school—and between university and high school faculty—will be important to making such a program a success. As it looks beyond this initial workshop, the network will continue to refine institutional processes and cultivate relationships through collaborative projects, regional programming, and frequent communication.³

Recommended Priorities for the STL DH Network

As we approached the end of the workshop, we asked the participants to recommend priorities for the STL DH Network to pursue. Drawing upon the day's discussions, these are the priorities the participants recommended to the attention of the network:

1. Hold conversations around what DH is and how to use it.
2. Frame DH as something the world is moving toward as opposed to a program that teachers are expected to implement.
3. Expose people to DH tools and help them identify which tools would be most effective in the classroom.
4. Establish best practices for implementing DH in the classroom.
5. Provide a model of what a classroom rich in DH looks like.
6. Consider a focus on particular tools, such as GIS.
7. Designate point people for a tool in a professional learning community, or a contact person in a college.
8. Establish relationships between universities and communities/teachers.
9. Bring more voices to the table as we establish network goals.

Most of these items (the first two in particular) relate to communication, suggesting that the first obstacle to improving DH pedagogy is explaining what it is and why it is important, and convincing teachers that it is not a passing fad. Items three through seven also deal with communication but focus more on the nuts and bolts of how to perform DH in the classroom and supporting teachers in their efforts to do it. Items eight and nine are crucial to long-term success. SIUE is one university in the region that has successfully built relationships with its local community with projects like Digital East St. Louis and Community-Oriented Digital Engagement Scholars, and other institutions should be encouraged to develop similar relationships. As for bringing more voices to the table, the STL DH Network aims to do so as it continues its efforts at outreach and network development.

Conclusion

This workshop was only one stage of a larger process of building a robust network of digital humanities practitioners and strengthening teaching in the digital humanities in the St. Louis area. A second workshop took place in September 2022, and the priorities developed by the participants of the “Improving Digital Humanities Pedagogy in St. Louis” workshop were instrumental in shaping that workshop’s agenda. The September workshop developed guidelines for the remote participation of area high school or undergraduate students in DH projects headquartered at other St. Louis-area colleges, working from the insights from the earlier workshop’s participants as discussed above. Putting these guidelines into practice will require extensive cooperation between college and high school faculty, so the network’s future will depend on the ability of faculty to successfully bridge the institutional and cultural divides between higher and secondary education. Our April workshop showed us how valuable and necessary such cooperation is in today’s educational environment.

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Footnotes

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2. Other major projects that exhibit these features include Colored Conventions and the DISCO Network. Colored Conventions, an award-winning platform for exhibits and records related to nineteenth-century Black political organizing, provides detailed teaching guides for several of its exhibits at both the college and the K–12 levels (the latter with Common Core alignments). Everything from the website’s design to its guides for teaching emphasizes the collaborative nature of the project and its commitment to providing its collaborators with “equitable compensation, acknowledgement, and attribution” (Foreman et al.). The DISCO Network connects scholars working to support anti-racism and anti-ableism in the context of the study of digital technologies. The network simultaneously pursues an educational mission by offering “scholarly training within five research labs, mentoring and publishing opportunities, and public programming” (Nakamura et al.). ↵

3. To date, such efforts have included collaboration on developing a curated website of DH lessons, developing a regional showcase of student work in DH, and informal hangouts on the network’s Discord server. ↵