Building a Habitat for the Digital Humanities

Adding Digital Project Support to the Library Services

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Recent History at UAL

- added & equipped spaces for general use...

Gorgas Learning Commons
Recent History at UAL

- added & equipped spaces for general use...

Small Group Conferencing
Recent History at UAL

- added & equipped spaces for general use...

Instructional & Lab Space
A Space Specifically for

- ... & graduate students
- needed ...
  - technology
  - flexible layout
  - defined purpose
  - users
Dream Big
Then Focus

- *Gorgas = humanities & social sciences*
- *mix of technologies: proven & sandbox*
- *flexible & enhance-able*
Need Conversation

- all about process, not technology
- brown bag lunch discussions
Learned...

- time was right
- interest was high
- needs not being met
- desire to experiment
- skill sets needed, we had

http://www.realestatecontentsystem.com/
And best of all...

... we have enthusiasts and skeptics!

... we have old hands and newbies!

... we have tenured and tenure-track faculty!
Working Model

Scholar

Designer

DB Admin

Archivist

Metadata

Project Mgr

Curator

Facilitator-Catalyst
And so it happened...
Background

Who we are, what we do

Jason [web]
Director of the Office of Library Technology

Shawn [data]
Metadata Librarian

Shared Expertise and Experience
Librarian-Scholar Consultations

• Leveraging librarians' technology skills

• What we expected

• How we started

• Understanding faculty needs
The Shakespeare Scholar

**Project**
Creating a website for Shakespeare adaptations encoded in TEI

**Project Needs**
Advice on choosing and administering a CMS, getting started with XML and TEI; server space

**Challenges**
Unsure if we could offer server space or technical support for installing a CMS
The Community Engagement Scholar

**Project**

Creating a website to showcase high school student photography of the post-tornado experience

**Project Needs**

Advice on choosing a CMS, capturing and organizing image and geo metadata, designing a site with robust search/browse features; server space

**Challenges**

Unsure if we could offer server space for website or repository space for digital image content
The Military Historian

Project
Creating a database for revolutionary war muster roll data.

Project Needs
Advice on creating a data model, building a database, populating the database with transcribed data from ~400 Word documents

Challenges
Helping him feel comfortable with outside assistance; connecting him with project assistance
The Antiquities Scholar

Project
Creating an online bibliography of Late Antiquity Middle Eastern manuscripts and an authority file of authors

Project Needs
Advice on how to store authority data, finding/creating a simple interface for data entry

Challenges
Recommending any specific solutions to match his team's limited tech skills
Lessons Learned

We need **policies!**

- Meeting expectations
- Not overwhelming librarians

**Where can I put this stuff?**

- Repository space needs
- Sandbox environments

Finding faculty **assistance** for project tasks

- Understanding scope
- Collaborations within the community
- Locating the right person to ask (matchmaking)
Follow-up Interviews

What we hoped to learn

What we asked

What they said and what we're doing about it
- Community
- Workshops
- Sharing our processes, approaches, and failures
Getting feedback

How well did we address your project needs? Did we raise any new questions for you?

Did we use too much jargon?

Did you leave with a better idea of how to proceed with your project?

What else would you like the ADHC to offer?
Provide scholars with workshops and one-on-one training on basic tech skills

• XML Basics

• XML Schema and XSLT

• Setting up a LAMP/MAMP/WAMP environment
“I’d love to **bounce my project ideas** off of other scholars”

“Could we have more **community-based** learning sessions?”

“I’d like to see what others involved in the **Center are working on**”

“I want to **connect** with scholars who have the **tech experience** that I don’t”
Librarians as **community builders**

- Create online *community profiles* for scholars and librarians to share their projects and experience

- Start an **online forum** where scholars can ask questions of each other

- Invite active ADHC members to write for a **collaborative blog**

- Hold *brown bag discussions* on special topics in DH

**Outreach!**
“I liked hearing you talk about projects similar to mine”

“I felt validated hearing that you've run into the same problems I did”

“You helped me put my own project in perspective”
Path to Production

“a workflow that move's one's code in predictable ways from areas specifically carved out for mess-making, idiosyncrasy, and flux to those that have been progressively tamed -- areas engineered for greater fixity and stability.”

Librarians as models of good practice

• Share with scholars what we do *on the job*

• Show scholars what goes into bringing an idea from *development* to *test* to *production*
There is an impulse in libraries to

“[lay] a smooth professional veneer over increasingly decrepit and under-funded infrastructure—effectively of hiding the **messy innards** of the library from your faculty”

**Librarians as models of “good enough” practice**

- Make a conscious effort to incorporate examples from our own work (successes and failures) in workshops, discussions, and consultations.

- Focus on creating an atmosphere where scholars feel comfortable asking "stupid" questions.
“I don't know what you do”

“I don't want to bother you”

“I don't know who to ask”

“I don't know what help I'm allowed to ask for”

“I don't want to waste your time”
“...organizational service mentality prevents librarians and library staff from engaging with faculty as true intellectual partners—from developing the kind of relationships that foster frankness and fellow-feeling...”

“What if part of our obligation...were to assert our own intellectual and research agendas?”

Meeting scholars where they are

• Use terminology and practices that scholars understand, like “office hours”

• Bring our own projects and ideas to the table

• Be open to collaborating on projects rather than just supporting them
Conclusion

• Research will continue changing

• Creating a community of researchers
  • faculty AND librarians
  • sharing benefits

• A digital humanities habitat can be built anywhere
Questions?

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