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## This Week in Digital Humanities and Pedagogy

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## This Week in Digital Humanities and Pedagogy

July 22, 2015

*Each week, a member of the JITP Editorial Collective assembles and shares the news items, ongoing discussions, and upcoming events of interest to us (and hopefully you). This week's installment is edited by [Dominique Zino](#).*

Last week, I joined a group of 29 participants at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon, for a summer institute for community college digital humanists, “Beyonds Pockets of Innovation, Toward a Community of Practice,” the first NEH-sponsored Advanced Topics in Digital Humanities Institute specifically designed for community college faculty. The week's events were organized by [Dr. Anne McGrail](#), Professor of English at Lane Community College, who [led the NEH Office of Digital Humanities \(ODH\) Start-Up Grant](#) that made the institute possible. Presenting before the NEH ODH in 2014, McGrail noted that survey data confirmed that “community college faculty have teaching and service loads that limit their engagement with DH. These faculty need dedicated time to situate DH theory, methods, and practice in their institutional settings,” she urged. (For broader data on engagement with DH tools and methods at two-year colleges, see [these data snapshots from the Fall 2013 NEH-sponsored survey of Digital Humanities at Community Colleges](#).)

At a moment when [research on community colleges](#) is encouraging two-year institutions to move away from “cafeteria-style” course offerings and toward structured pathways to degrees, coupling thoughtful, interactive pedagogy with the use of more public, visible, hackable digital tools may help faculty to make strong arguments for the types of learning that will most benefit their students. The [schedule for the week](#) included presentations by scholars who have made the digital humanities a centerpiece of their pedagogy, including [Jesse Stommel](#), [Matt Gold](#), [Marta Effinger-Crichlow](#), and [Roopika Risam](#). Discussions of readings about the aims, shape, and outcomes of DH methods were complemented by plenty of hands-on testing of tools and platforms and—perhaps most valuably—informal conversations between participants about how they were already implementing such tools and methods in their classrooms.

The questions that emerged from the week's discussions certainly could not be addressed in just one five-day institute: What counts as “digital humanities” work? What is specific about digital humanities methods in community colleges? Why might digital humanities as a field need participation from community college faculty and students? How might learning through digital humanities theory and methods be presented to various audiences (e.g. colleagues, administrators, students, and the public at large)? How might DH at the community college disrupt the rhetorical and lived relationship between the community college and the university? We hope that others will keep the conversation going, online and in person, and consider creating a “DH at the CC” institute at their home campus to build on the work that began in Eugene (see the CFP for the NEH Initiatives at Community Colleges grants at the bottom of this post).

## Locating a sense of purpose: local knowledge, global tools

Jesse Stommel started the week by urging us to let course learning objectives and student needs dictate our adoption of digital tools. He encouraged faculty to place value on engagement, discovery, and community building rather than assessment and management of content. We discussed the importance of foregrounding assignment design with **reflective questions** and reminded one another that the goal of assessment should be better learning rather than better assessment practices. (You can see Jesse's full **presentation slides on Critical Digital Pedagogy via Slide Share**.) Talking at our respective tables during Stommel's session led to participants creating easy "plug and play" ideas for their writing classes:

- putting the day's assigned reading into **Wordle** to start a conversation with your students, then using it to introduce **textual analysis**, asking students to think critically about which words might qualify as keywords (as well as what themes aren't named but might be present).
- tweeting to practice paraphrasing in 140 characters or less.
- using a thesis generator (there are many examples of thesis creators—**here's just one**), asking students to write a faux essay based on it. By exchanging and critiquing the essays, individually or in small groups, students can draw conclusions about the types of writing and thinking such formulas produce.
- practicing annotation through tools such as **Hypothes.is** and **Lit Genius**, which bring together communities of readers and provide students with models of annotation they can mimic and critique.
- when we think about the types of data sets we can have students gather (at least initially), we might aim for **pattern recognition in smaller data** (mapping or graphing a single short story, novel, or poem) over huge data sets.

On day two, Matt Gold stressed the value of **project-based learning**. Building on their previous day's focus on the classroom, Gold urged participants to think about how particular tools and programs could be used across an entire community. He also stressed the importance of applying for grants and knowing the **lingo of grant writing**. His advice in short:

- scale up and think big
- build on your college's mission
- use less sexy blocks (e.g. the creation of a lab space) to build up to larger DH work
- build community-oriented spaces and resources into the grant, aligning the grant project with well-known cultural institutions when possible
- plan a thorough budget (including release time, tool/platform creation, meetings/institutes, staff, and materials/equipment)
- explore various funding sources (local, institutional, regional, **NEH, NSF, NIH, IMLS, DOE**)

*If DH cannot succeed at community colleges, it cannot succeed. Period. #DHattheCC*

— Matt Gold (@mkgold) July 15, 2015

## Equity, access, and (in)visibility

On day three, Marta Effinger-Crichlow asked the group to consider the possibilities of **digital cultural mapping**: What do students think are the boundaries in their communities? Why have they visited some places and not others? What spaces do they encounter on a daily basis? How does a digital cultural mapping project acknowledge the uniqueness of a space, or a visitor? What kind of skills, knowledge, and values do we, as teachers, want students to acquire from exercises in digital cultural mapping? That evening, Effinger-Crichlow delivered an engaging keynote address, “Mapping **Black New York: An Interdisciplinary Home**,” showcasing the way she investigates with her students at the New York City College of Technology the visible and invisible histories of slavery in New York City.

*“Space is not an innocent backdrop to position.” Marta Effinger-Crichlow #DHattheCC*

*— anne mcgrail (@annemcgrail) July 16, 2015*

On day four, Roopika Risam introduced us to a range of social justice projects:

- **Confederated Tribe of Siletz Indians**
- **Mukurtu**
- **Chicana Por Mi Raza**
- **Education in Our Barrios**
- **Redshift and Portalmetal**
- **Mapping Police Violence**
- **Transatlantic Slave Trade Database**
- **South Asian American Digital Archive**

Engaging with issues of participation and social justice reminded us that if DH is about social change in traditional hierarchies, community colleges are at once the most pressing and complicated sites to attempt to upend such hierarchies. In fact, Risam admitted in our small group discussion that she had not known what to expect when she agreed to be one of a group of workshop leaders; she was unsure of the levels of expertise with digital tools that would be represented across the group, as well as they way participants’ home institutional cultures would inform their expectations and goals. Her uncertainty pointed to a defining feature of teaching in/with the digital humanities at a community college: one can never predict the range of academic ability of the students who walk into our classrooms, the range of familiarity with tools, devices, or platforms, or the range of comfort and creativity students might display when using digital tools to learn how to learn.

## The Importance of Storytelling

The institute ended on Friday with a day of sharing the **digital stories** each participant created, **guided by tips** from Lane Community College faculty member **Sandy Jensen**. In fact, there were many ways in which the activities of the week were catalogued and captured. Check out the **Storified tweets from the institute**, compiled by George Washington PhD candidate and community college faculty member **Tawnya Ravy**. Tawnya has also started a weekly “capture” of ideas, links, and tools, **the first “issue” of**

which you can see [here](#). Institute members (and others, we hope!) will continue to use the handle [#DHattheCC](#) to crowdsource information about experiences with DH tools, methods, and theory in the community college classroom. Finally, coming this fall, look out for a segment on the DH at the CC Institute in Eugene by Courtney Danforth on [KairosCast \(@KairosRTP\)](#).

## Upcoming dates

[Humanities Intensive Learning and Teaching \(HILT\)](#): July 27-30

[The Association for Authentic, Experiential, Evidence-based Learning \(AAEEBL\)](#): July 27-30

Apply for an [NEH Humanities Initiatives at Community Colleges grant](#) (*receipt deadline is August 24, 2015 for projects beginning April 2016*). Watch an introduction to the Humanities Initiatives grants by NEH Humanities Senior Program Officer Julia Nguyen [here](#).

[THATCamp Transform DH](#) (College Park, MD): October 3  
*Did we miss something? Send hot tips, cool CFPs, and warmly worded rants to [admin@jitpedagogy.org](mailto:admin@jitpedagogy.org).*

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