

'State of the Art': Negotiating a National Standards-approved Digital Humanities Curriculum

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James Smithies (Presenter), Paul Millar, Craig Bellamy

The University of Canterbury has recently completed development of New Zealand (and Australasia's) first digital humanities degree program that is also standards-approved on a national level. The process required the development of document sets that were submitted for review by the University of Canterbury Faculty, Academic Advisory Committee, Academic Board, the New Zealand Vice-Chancellor's Committee on University Academic Programs (CUAP), the New Zealand Vice-Chancellor's Committee, and the Tertiary Education Commission. Fourteen national and international reviewers, drawn from technology education, information science, computer science, high performance computing and the digital humanities also provided their opinions. The program represents a significant baseline for future digital humanities programs, and the lessons learned during its development are of importance to the broader digital humanities community. Although New Zealand universities operate with basically the same degree of independence in course and program development as universities elsewhere in the world, the requirement to submit all new programs to a national standards body is unusual, if not unique. It may be that the University of Canterbury digital humanities program is the most closely scrutinised example the digital humanities community have seen. This has resulted in a program that is embedded within both the culture of Canterbury, and the national educational policies of NZ. It therefore comes with a higher degree of legitimacy, but also a complex set of stake holders. Moreover, because of the close policy ties between New Zealand and Australia (in education as well as other areas) the program has implications for the Australasian region as a whole.

The implications of national accreditation

Programs and curriculums have pedagogical, methodological, administrative and indeed philosophical issues embedded in them. Their final form reflects not only the 'state of the art' in the discipline in question, but the 'state of the art' as parsed through academic staff, informed (and uninformed) reviewers, institutional context (and necessity), national educational politics, and the shifting sands of methodological and critical best practice. The forces are such that it is quite possible for the final program of study to be quite different from that originally intended, although for obvious reasons the applicants tend to press on regardless, making modifications where necessary but attempting to safeguard the core pedagogical principles wherever possible. This is a process that many digital humanities teams should be expected to go through in the coming years as more institutions attempt to establish programs; it is a period in time when the digital humanities are going to begin to be influenced not only by internal pressure, but external ones such as the need to conform to national educational standards.

Teaching applied and critical DH in the context of standards-approved accreditation

The program will be delivered to fourth year students undertaking their ‘Honours’ year, a first year of post-graduate study often taken before embarking on more advanced Masters or PhD study. The program was informed by existing programs at Kings College London, University College London, the Open University (Wilks, 2011) and the University of California, but the author drew most heavily on theoretical and pedagogical perspectives raised through DH social media and publishing channels over the past five years. A balance has been struck between the ‘hack’ and ‘yak’ positions (Cecire, 2011; Ramsay, 2011; Koh, 2012 and others), in the light of what Alexander Reid has suggested is a need for the field to equip students with a broad “yet undefined digital literacy” (Reid, 2012, 354) encompassing both technical and critical skills. The position taken is similar to that espoused by Alan Liu and Andrew Prescott, who argue that tomorrow’s students and scholars will need to function in a world in which computers are not only ubiquitous, but knowledge itself is a commodity (Liu, 2004; Prescott, 2012). In this sense, the program assumes an ethical imperative to prepare students for work in the post-industrial society that was envisaged by Daniel Bell in 1973, and now forms the basis of both graduate employment structures (Castells and Aoyama, 1994; Aneesh, 2001; Cohen, 2010) and tertiary education systems (Donoghue, 2008; Brier, 2012). In keeping with the core values of the digital humanities community, emphasis has been placed on the development of technical skills that can enhance and extend humanities research activities, and promote awareness of the engineered nature of the digital world.

The program is structured around two core assessment papers: *DIGI 401: Introduction to Digital Humanities* and *DIGI 402: Humanities and New Media*. *DIGI 480: Research Essay* will also be available, to students interested in exploring a topic in detail via a 10,000 word essay. A variety of other (assessment) papers will be rolled out in future years, including Applied Digital Humanities, Digital Literary Studies, and Digital History. Masters and Ph.D. offerings are expected to follow. *DIGI 401: Introduction to Digital Humanities* is modelled on courses in historical method that are well known to History students. The course provides a broad and challenging overview of the digital humanities, organised into History, Theory and Applied modules. Topics include technological determinism, systems theory, materiality and digital forensics, the nature of digital texts, and data visualization. Introductory lectures on TEI and GIS will prepare students for further study in Digital Literary Studies and Digital History. In order to provide students with generically useful programming knowledge an applied module will concentrate on teaching TEI, GIS, Python and use of APIs. Lecturers will be drawn from University of Canterbury’s Digital Humanities program, Human Interface Technology Laboratory, Computer Science, Information Systems, and Geography. The aim is to offer the students an overview of tools and methods in the digital humanities, and encourage them to think about how the digital world is engineered. *DIGI 402: Humanities and New Media* is an overt attempt to blend the ‘hack’ and ‘yak’ sides to DH as a practice. Students will be strongly encouraged to take DIGI 401 before taking 402 so they have a solid understanding of the technical side to new media culture and politics. Topics in this course include digital modernity,

technocracy, cybernetics, knowledge economies, the Internet, open and closed data, open and closed ecosystems. Focus will be placed on both the engineered nature of the digital world, and the concepts required to critique it. Assessment will include traditional essay-based assessment, blog posts, forum posts, and quizzes designed to ensure students are capable of analysing the digital world as an engineered phenomenon.

Pedagogical focus will be placed on graduate outcomes across the program as a whole, and students will be offered opportunities for student exchanges, internship and work experience opportunities. The aim is for graduates to have a blend of traditional humanities-related skills and applied computing skills. They should have an understanding of the moral and ethical issues surrounding digital technologies, the ability to write clear, concise prose, and an understanding of the technical constraints and opportunities provided by digital technologies. Students should be well suited to work in all new media and digital industries, but especially ones requiring a blend of analytical and technical skills. Graduates would be suitable for work in research, relationship management, business analysis, digital archiving, project management, and the creative and cultural heritage sectors. They should be particularly suited to policy analysis positions related to technology and culture, and any position that requires communication across technical and non-technical audiences. The aim is to create a 'porous' educational environment that encourages interaction both inside and outside the university, equipping students with experiences and relationships that can translate into enhanced employment prospects. Inter-disciplinarily will be encouraged, and it is hoped that a DH Commons can be developed to integrate university service support teams in the library and digital media group into the learning experience.

The accreditation process means that, while reflecting the core aims and values of the digital humanities community, the program is also relevant to the pedagogical and strategic aims of the University of Canterbury and the wider New Zealand tertiary education sector. Although challenging, once successfully negotiated the accreditation process effectively embeds the digital humanities into the New Zealand government's long-term education strategy, providing significant pedagogical sanction, integration with the secondary education sector, and a strong platform for future growth. All New Zealand, and undoubtedly Australian, universities aiming to develop digital humanities programs will need to reference the University of Canterbury as a baseline. The implications of this for the development of the digital humanities across Australasia are significant, and (as long as the Canterbury program enshrines core DH aims and values) largely positive.

This paper will provide an overview of the program from intellectual, pedagogical and strategic perspectives in an attempt to share lessons learned with the international DH community, and redress some of the "emphasis on research over teaching" prevalent in the field (Brier, 2012, 391). Specific focus will be placed on the implications of the program for Australia and the development of the digital humanities across Australasia as a whole. All program documentation will be made available online so that conference participants have full-text access to the issues being discussed.

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