
Developing the Humanities HyperMedia Centre @ Acadia University

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We propose a panel session of five speakers, one of whom will act as chair also, to discuss the process of implementing a new initiative in humanities computing, the Humanities Hypermedia Centre, that has been under development at Acadia University since the fall of 2002.

At Acadia all faculty and students are issued with the same model of laptop computer outfitted with a common software template in order to enhance networking capabilities and ensure that all students have the opportunity to become proficient in the use of that software. Through funding from the McConnell Family Foundation, the Humanities HyperMedia Centre (HHC) was implemented to ensure that humanities students in particular were given opportunities to create their own new media projects and publish them in a dedicated database, the Acadia Humanities HyperMedia Archive, or AhHa!

AhHa! will be a database of digital objects and new media projects created primarily by Acadia students. It will give students access to each other's work and provide them with opportunities to contribute-and to know they are contributing-to the creation of a substantial, verified, body of work. It will also enable them to compile sophisticated examples of their own work for display when they leave Acadia. AhHa! is designed to allow faculty members to share teaching and research material in a more efficient manner than has been available previously.

It is the goal of the HHC to ensure that students graduate with a firm grounding in the Arts and Humanities, as well as a high level of information literacy and cutting edge skills in digital communication.

We have learned - sometimes the hard way - that developing and implementing a complex initiative involving six academic units (Classics, English, History, Philosophy, the university library system, and the Acadia Institute for Teaching Technology-an in-house technological development office) is a lengthy, challenging, and often surprising process. By the time of the ACH/ALLC Conference some of the components of the HHC will be up and running, whilst others will still be awaiting their launch. We therefore intend to offer the panel both to discuss the challenges we have faced, and the discoveries we have made, as we evolved the project from proposal stage to implementation, and also to solicit advice from other teams that have undergone or are undertaking the same process. Specifically we intend to address issues such as:

- The logistics of pedagogy - how do we assure program viability by gaining long-term financial and teaching commitments from teaching units, support units, and administration?
- The pitfalls of program development - unforeseen problems in proposing, developing, and setting up the administrative support for a new Multidisciplinary Minor in Hypermedia.
- Factors that contribute to the robustness of a program such as the HHC - and factors that contribute to its fragility. On the positive side these can be long term financial commitments from granting agencies; recognition from administrative planning sectors that new, multidisciplinary projects like HHC require a rethink of "faculty complement", especially on a departmental basis; ongoing technological support that ensures synergy between pedagogy and technological development, both hardware and software; and an administrative recognition that the development of innovative projects such as HHC need to be factored into the career review of those involved. On the negative side, bureaucratic neglect, problems of working within the short-term planning cycle common to most universities (and especially to most university departments), departmental parochialism and even outright competitiveness, and unanticipated events - such as labour actions or funding changes - can all affect the long-term viability of a program, however agile its implementation.
- The impact of working on such a project for a group of young, relatively junior and recently-appointed faculty members and technical personnel.

We therefore propose to offer a panel consisting of four members of the HHC team and a student who enrolled in both of the first two courses offered by the HHC. Each of the team members will discuss the process of development and

implementation from a different perspective, while our student will offer observations on the challenges and rewards of participating in the HHC.

Richard Cunningham: The team leader and point-person whose name is most closely associated with the program university-wide. His presentation will focus on the senior liaison aspects of the program, both with administration and with component departments and non-academic partners.

David Duke: A team member who has been active primarily on the pedagogical side of the program. His presentation will focus on the pressures of developing a "non-departmental" offering, and will discuss the opportunities inherent in this particular multidisciplinary project.

John Eustace: A team member who was particularly active in the early phase of the program, John left on a year-long sabbatical and has returned to continue his association with the project. His absence and return allows for a unique perspective from an "outsider-insider" who can comment on the nature of progress in a project such as this.

Anna Galway: A student in Sixteenth-century Literature and in Twentieth-century English Literature and Culture, the first two classes to be offered as HHC courses, will speak to the experience of learning to create hypertextual documents and submit them to a database still undergoing beta-testing.

Erin Patterson: A team member who has been active on both the pedagogical and technical sides of the project, whose background is not classroom-based but library science. Her presentation will cover the opportunities and pitfalls inherent in involving a university sector that has been traditionally ancillary to the direct pedagogical or curriculum development sectors of the university.