Hybrid Cyber-Librarians: The CLIR Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Scholarly Information Resources for Humanists

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The Council on Library and Information Resources (`<http://www.clir.org/>`) has developed a unique new program of crucial interest to the membership of the Association for Computers and the Humanities: the *CLIR Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Scholarly Information Resources for Humanists*. The stated purpose of this program, now in its first year at ten U.S. academic libraries, is "to establish a new kind of scholarly information professional" by offering individuals with a recent Ph.D. in a humanities field a chance to acquire the experience of the academic librarian in the digital age (CLIR , `<http://www.clir.org/fellowships/postdoc/postdoc.html>`, "Information"). ACH is one of the few professional associations in which scholars, librarians, and technology specialists come together as a coherent community; every one of its members is no doubt aware that communication in other venues between these three professions is highly problematic. Moreover, people who undertake humanities computing projects are frequently frustrated by the fact that their professions lack a structure that allows new-model collaborative work to be recognized and rewarded.

Successful humanities computing initiatives such as the *Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities* (`<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/>`) at the University of Virginia could not have been possible without the enthusiastic collaboration of scholars, librarians, and technology specialists. Those involved in these initiatives understand that the nature of the work often goes beyond the collaborative or even the interdisciplinary to become what we might call the 'interprofessional'. On humanities computing projects, it is rare to find individuals rigidly adhering to their own professional skills and duties as though on an assembly line. Usually, those who participate develop into information professionals who possess various proportions of expertise in scholarship, library science, and technology.

Such interprofessional work is not credentialed, however, nor is it generally practiced outside the humanities computing community. This creates serious problems not only for individuals whose work has been interprofessional but also for the whole enterprise of digital scholarship. Scholars who have been involved in humanities computing projects are far more likely than other scholars to understand the challenges facing academic librarians in the digital age — but all scholars are beginning to expect high-level digital services from their libraries. CLIR frames this problem thus:

> Libraries digitize primary resources to respond to the demands of individual scholars, but scholars don't recognize the complexity of carrying out this task nor do they understand the demands placed on librarians who need to improve access and ensure preservation... Scholars are increasingly accepting of digital publication, while librarians are finding that the contract law that controls access to such publications makes preservation impossible and access problematic.
> (CLIR , `<http://www.clir.org/fellowships/postdoc/detail.html>`, "Program")

But is the creation of a new hybrid professional the answer to problems such as these, or does a program such as the CLIR post-doctoral fellowship threaten to undermine the valuable discrete professional knowledge of librarians, scholars, and technology specialists? A recent *Library Journal* article on the CLIR Post-Doctoral Fellowship takes the latter position, declaring that "It weakens our profession when we open it to Ph.D.'s without established library credentials" (`<http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA474993>`, Crowley) This perspective emphasizes the unique skills belonging to a particular profession, a perspective that might well be shared by some scholarly professionals and some technology professionals. Is the specialized knowledge of these professions endangered or diluted by the collaborations that are so common on humanities computing projects? Should interprofessional credentialization be encouraged?

We suspect that the membership of ACH has much to contribute to this discussion, and we believe that the first year of the CLIR Post-Doctoral Fellowship is the ideal time to discuss the professionalization issues faced by information professionals engaged in humanities computing projects. We therefore propose

a ninety-minute session in which panelists will engage in debate about the CLIR Post-Doctoral Fellowship and related professionalization and specialization issues. We invite the members of ACH to engage in this discussion of the principles behind—and future of—this attempt to credential a new species of digital scholar-librarian.

Bibliography

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