
National Support for Humanities Computing: Different Achievements, Needs and Prospects

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Different countries vary greatly in the kinds of national structures, services and funding resources they provide for humanities computing. Most if not all of us involved in the field are faced by similar challenges, though in different ways and varying degrees: lack of IT awareness in our subject communities, shortage of technical support, insufficient academic recognition, the need to take advantage of new technological developments in other fields, the need for more, or better, digital data resources and tools, problems of standards, and much more. The purpose of this session is to explore the ways different countries have met and are meeting these challenges: differences in existing provision at national level, whether publicly or privately funded; different national needs and procedures for identifying them; new strategies and initiatives for the future.

Three panellists represent Canada, the UK and the USA, and each occupies a key position in humanities computing in their country. Between now and the conference we shall recruit at least one further panellist, from a non-English-speaking country [our planned fourth contributor has had to withdraw]. Even on their own, however, these three English-speaking countries show striking differences. Each speaker will make a brief presentation in respect of his own country on:

- national-level support structures, services and funding resources;
- new and forthcoming strategic initiatives;
- national needs: how are they or can they be identified, and how far have they not yet been met?

The ensuing discussion will invite relevant input about other countries, seek to identify the different issues and problems

raised by different forms of support, consider how far national needs differ, and explore the scope for new forms of international collaboration in the area.

David Robey (Director, AHRB ICT in Arts and Humanities Research Programme): the UK

The UK has latterly developed a strong system of support by national public funding bodies for humanities computing. Two funding bodies are involved: the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB), and the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). Each has provided substantial support for data-creation projects, generally through open competition: out of over £100m spent by the AHRB on research project awards since 1999, about half has been given to projects with some kind of digital output. Some limited support has also been given to the creation of software tools and systems of specifically humanities interest. As far as services are concerned, the AHRB and JISC jointly fund the Arts and Humanities Data Service, to the extent of some £1m p.a., with a brief to provide national support for data creation and preservation, including a national repository for the digital output of publicly funded research. JISC and the AHRB jointly fund Humbul, the humanities hub of the Resource Discovery Network, providing portal access to on-line resources in the UK and internationally. JISC has also funded a new suite of on-line introductory training resources in the use of ICT for humanities researchers who have not progressed beyond the elementary use of word-processing, email and web-browsers (ARIA).

Launched last year, the ICT in Arts and Humanities Research Programme, a major new initiative by the AHRB, is funding two new initiatives: the ICT Methods Network, a centre for the exchange and dissemination of advanced ICT methodologies in arts and humanities research, which will complement the AHDS by focussing on methods, processes and uses of data; and a scheme of ICT Strategy Projects, which will partly gather knowledge about ICT uses and needs in the arts and humanities, and partly develop generic ICT resources and tools in the area. The Programme is also promoting and developing an arts and humanities e-science, or e-research, agenda, taking advantage of the high-profile activities currently taking place under this heading in other domains. All these public supports are funded for the medium term only, until 2007. In 2006 the AHRB will conduct a fundamental strategic review of ICT support provision and the related needs of the arts and humanities research communities, with a view to determining longer-term systems of provision.

The UK therefore has some strong support structures in place, and plans have been laid for better determining future needs.

Nevertheless a lot of problems remain at the level of the individual humanities researcher. There is insufficient awareness in the research community of the potential of digital methods and resources; most importantly generic, low-level and specialist technical support are inadequate except in a very small number of institutions. The programme of public activities that is now being funded will be able to do something about the first problem, but it will be a long time before the second one is solved.

Geoffrey Rockwell (Project Leader for the Text Analysis Portal for Research project funded by the Canada Foundation for Innovation): Canada

This discussion will offer a brief history of the major centres and organizations of humanities computing in Canada, with special attention to the emergence of a national society; an overview of the new and coming programs, both undergraduate and graduate, and the types of research positions being created to support them; and a survey of some of the major research projects and how Canadian researchers have worked with provincial and federal funding agencies like OIT (Ontario Innovation Trust), SSHRC (Social Science and Humanities Research Council) and CFI (Canada Foundation for Innovation). Special attention will be given to some current projects including the TAPoR (Text Analysis Portal for Research) project, and a new initiative, iMatter, that is developing the case for a national digital arts and humanities research institute--an initiative which is working within the context of a major transformation of our research council.

The presentation will be aimed primarily at describing strategies that have worked and may be applicable elsewhere, and at describing opportunities for transnational funding. Humanities computing in Canada has developed a national network around a society with annual meetings, we have developed a network of programs, centres and research faculty positions. What is missing?

One relationship that is stronger in other countries is the connection with the library and information science community. Another relationship is with media studies and journalism. A third and important next step is to make strategic alliances that will allow us to develop contextualized knowledge, especially theory, that reflects the pragmatics of digital humanities work. In this we can work with the digital artists, especially those working in university contexts who also do research and creation. Research/creation, a term drawn from the UK AHRB for a new grant program, is a unique form of academic practice

that combines the communicative, the critical and the creative. In other words, it is time to think systematically and together about doing and making, and to think through doing and making. In such an endeavor we can also reach forward into the emerging games studies or interactive arts community which, we believe, will develop along similar lines that weave research and creation together. We are beginning to tell each other stories of what learning and research will look like in the next generation of institutes.

John Unsworth (Chair, ACLS Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for Humanities and Social Sciences): the USA

In the United States, there is no single source of funding for humanities computing activities. The National Endowment for the Humanities has, over the past decade, funded a number of important humanities computing projects, especially in the realm of editorial work, and more recently in the online state encyclopedias. The Institute for Museum and Library Services (now more well-funded than NEH) will also sometimes provide funding for digital scholarly projects, if they include library, archive, or museum participation. The National Science Foundation has been a more difficult source from which to fund humanities computing projects, but some--especially those that have something to do with speech recognition or natural language processing--have gotten funded.

Probably the most consistent source of support for humanities computing in higher education has been the Andrew W. Mellon foundation, which has supported large collaborative projects across a number of disciplines (literature, archaeology, art history, music, linguistics, etc.). Other private foundations have been involved as well, but none so prominently as Mellon. Mellon is also responsible for some of the most significant non-commercial infrastructure projects, where infrastructure refers to shared resources: *JSTOR*, the social science journals project, is a Mellon creation, as is the more recent *ArtStor*, which brings together images useful for teaching and research in art, art history, archaeology, and other areas. Mellon has also funded *Bibliovault*, at the University of Chicago Press (for converting print backlist books to print-on-demand, for university presses), the *TORCH* project at Oxford UP (for delivering university press materials to individual and institutional subscribers in electronic form), and the electronic imprint at the University of Virginia Press, for publishing born-digital humanities scholarship. Mellon's also been a persistent funder of digital library research, for example the *FEDORA* project (to develop digital object repository architecture for complex digital content), the *Making of America* project, and many others.

While this history is admirable, and the digital library and humanities computing community owes much to the Andrew W. Mellon foundation, the leadership of that foundation is about to change hands, and that makes it an appropriate time to think about how the base of support for this activity might be broadened, among private foundations and government agencies alike. The recent NSF commission on cyberinfrastructure, led by Dan Atkins, produced a report whose recommendations are also an occasion for self-examination and strategic planning in the humanities and social science communities, as we consider what free-rider benefits there might be, for these communities, from the work that will be done in the computational sciences, and as we consider also what work is not likely to be done in those fields that will be important to the humanities and social sciences. To address those questions, the American Council of Learned Societies has assembled its own commission (with funding from Mellon), and that commission has held public meetings and private information-gathering and working sessions throughout 2004. A report from the commission is forthcoming in 2005, and this presenter, as chair of the commission, can offer a preview of the results of that process, and the conclusions of the report.