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## Disciplined: Using Curriculum Studies to Define 'Humanities Computing'

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**H**umanities Computing remains an emergent discipline. Although it has been a full half-century since the work of Roberto Busa, and the activities described as 'Humanities Computing' continue to expand in number, sophistication, and scholarly importance, the field is continually changing, developing, and defining itself. Most introspection regarding the role, meaning, and focus of 'Humanities Computing' as a discipline has come from a practical and pragmatic perspective from scholars and educators within the field itself. This paper aims to appropriate techniques from Education and Curriculum Studies to provide an alternative, externalised, viewpoint of the history and focus of Humanities Computing, by analysing the discipline through its teaching programs and message they deliver, either consciously or unconsciously, about the focus and scope of the discipline.

It is now over thirty years since the Association of Literary and Linguistic Computing was founded (in 1973), and almost twenty years since the first issue of *Literary and Linguistic Computing* was issued in 1986.<sup>1</sup> Attempts have been made to discuss how Humanities Computing as a field should be defined (McCarty 1998, Unsworth), how it relates to other disciplines (McCarty 1999), and how it should support the activities with which it is associated, both on an institutional (McCarty et al. 1997) and scholarly level (Orlandi). Histories of and companions to the discipline have begun to emerge (Fraser 1996, Schreibman et al. 2004), from both research, scholarly, and institutional perspectives (Warwick). Attention to these issues is intrinsic to such a multi-disciplinary field; the emergence of related discussions was a major reason for the creation of the Humanist discussion list in 1987,<sup>2</sup> and associated issues continue to appear on its postings.

Humanities Computing may now be pursued as part of undergraduate degree courses, and there are now various graduate programmes in the humanities, in both European and North American Universities, in which a computing component has a significant role. Humanities Computing can therefore be seen to exist as an independent academic subject, with undergraduate and graduate students, specialist faculty and

research staff, and coherent systems of communication, publication, peer review, and funding criteria, as well as reflective historical and academic analysis which has been undertaken by practitioners in the field.

From the viewpoint of Educational Studies, teaching can be seen to be at the heart of a discipline (Maskell and Robinson 2001), and the curriculum, or "content of a particular subject or area of study" (Kelly 3) shapes the field. Moreover, the curriculum can be seen to define the field in the way the publication record cannot: it is the 'hidden' history of the subject, the core skill set practitioners have chosen to pass on to younger scholars, and describes the purposes of the transmission of knowledge content, and an exploration of the effects that exposure to knowledge is likely to have (Kelly). An awareness of the complexity of the relationship between content, application, and intention of the curriculum is necessary to create coherent teaching practices and develop a homogeneous definition of an academic discipline (Knight). Additionally, the writing styles and practices stressed and encouraged within a curriculum can in themselves define the field (Monroe). The curriculum can be taken, therefore, to define what a particular discipline represents (Becher et al.).

Discussion of the curriculum of Humanities Computing is not novel. Indeed, there was an entire conference devoted to The Humanities Computing Curriculum: The Computing Curriculum in the Arts and Humanities (2001), at Malaspina University College, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada.<sup>3</sup> Most papers necessarily described the practical aspects of setting up Humanities Computing programs and courses, and defining an overview of the contents of courses. For example, Gilfillan and Musick outlined the practicalities involved in promoting the use of computing in humanities based teaching and research at the University of Oregon, and Hockey examined the role of computing in the humanities curriculum at both postgraduate and undergraduate levels. Additionally, there was also a seminar series which was undertaken to define and generate a syllabus for a graduate course in knowledge representation for humanists at the University of Virginia, which resulted in a comprehensive syllabus for a Master's Degree in Digital Humanities (Drucker et al.). The accompanying report and proposed syllabus serves as a reference to those who may undertake the teaching of similar masters programs in the future. More generally, the Aco\*hum project produced a study on how Computing was, is, and could be used in Humanities subjects (de Smedt). These studies all serve to illustrate how important defining the curriculum is to Humanities Computing, and how, as a nascent subject, much is still being done to define the teaching program, and the field: although their focus is mostly (and necessarily) a practical approach to how teaching programs can be implemented and integrated into academic departments and scholarly frameworks.

However, from an Educational and Curriculum studies perspective, the term 'curriculum' applies not only to the content of a particular subject area of study, but refers to the total programme of an educational institution: being

the overall rationale for any educational programme, including those more subtle features of curriculum change and development and especially those underlying elements [explanation and justification] — which are the most crucial element in Curriculum studies.

(Kelly 3)

This paper will report on an analysis of the Humanities Computing curriculum from an Educational, and Curriculum, Studies holistic perspective, to be carried out between November 2004 and May 2005 in the department of Education and Professional Development, at University College London.

A study of Humanities Computing in this manner will be useful and interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, as a nascent discipline, much of the documentation regarding the development of the curriculum is still available, and many practitioners and educators, who have seen the curriculum develop, are still working in the community, making access to such material relatively easy. Secondly, from the point of view of Curriculum Studies, it is quite rare to be able to study a field which is at this point of breakthrough into becoming an accepted academic discipline: compare this to more established academic subjects, where early development of the curriculum are all but lost. Thirdly, by focussing on the whole curriculum, an alternative viewpoint can be propagated as to what Humanities Computing is, and what it does. By rationalising the Humanities Computing curriculum in terms of Educational Theory, it may be possible to provide an alternative overview and definition of the discipline which is not merely limited to describing the content of courses, or programme syllabuses, but embraces the curriculum as a totality of purpose and content, including its formal, informal, planned, received, and hidden agendas.

This research will be carried out by undertaking an analysis of all available material gathered from the established teaching programs in the field (from both the UK and the USA), discussion lists, and educators, combined with surveys and interviews with leading practitioners (both teachers and researchers) and computational and content analysis of published, survey and interview material. Findings will be related to current theory and practice in Curriculum Studies. In doing so, it will be a sustained professional enquiry into the teaching and learning process of Humanities Computing, adopting the standard techniques from Curriculum Studies to analyse and understand the disciplinarity of the subject (Rowland 1993, Rowland 2000).

Questions asked in this study will include: can an analysis of the curriculum aid in defining Humanities Computing? How does the curriculum currently on offer differ from the research

agenda, as demonstrated through conference and publication records? Is there a common curriculum in existence between individual institutions and programs? How can the definition and rationalisation of the curriculum of this nascent discipline aid it in becoming entrenched in more traditional academic disciplines? How does the intention of Humanities Computing as a teaching discipline differ from the reality? What hidden implications and definitions are propagated about Humanities Computing through its curriculum? How does the role of computing in the discipline detract from the centralized control of the teacher necessary for steering the curriculum? What strategies for curriculum change, control, assessment, evaluation, appraisal, and accountability have been implemented in the Humanities Computing community? How do the writing styles promoted by Humanities Computing, through its curriculum, define and shape the field? If a common curriculum cannot be defined, does Humanities Computing as a subject really exist?

As this research will be carried out throughout late 2004 / early 2005, it is impossible to summarise its findings here: however, the fact that this is a novel and alternative approach to answering the perennial question "What is Humanities Computing?" , this research should yield useful insights. As Kelly notes:

A study of curriculum, while not offering us spurious answers to questions of values, will... draw our attention to important questions that need to be asked about policies and practices and help us achieve the kind of clarity which will enable us to see underlying ideologies more clearly.

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Viewing Humanities Computing from another perspective may aid us in defining and steering the direction of the discipline, whilst propagating a useful and alternative definition of the subject.

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1. The Association of Literary and Linguistic Computing published their journal twice yearly from 1980 to 1985, when this was merged with *ALLC bulletin* to become *Literary and Linguistic Computing* (1986).
  2. <<http://www.princeton.edu/~mccarty/humanist/>>
  3. The Humanities Computing Curriculum: The Computing Curriculum in the Arts and Humanities, Malaspina University College, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada. November 9-10, 2001. <<http://web.mala.bc.ca/siemensr/HCCurriculum/>>.

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