



RLI 284

Introduction

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The debate over the meaning of the term “digital humanities” has taken place as long as the field of humanities computing has been evolving in the production, curation, and interaction with knowledge that is born digital. Journals and associations are dedicated to the topic and study of digital humanities. Research centers at a number of academic institutions support research agendas around digital tools, text mining and visualization, and the creation and preservation of electronic literature. Colleges of information studies are creating curricula that teach librarians the skills needed to participate in digital humanities research activities. Libraries are creating positions in this area as they build new initiatives and partnerships for humanistic research and teaching.

To lend clarity to the topic, Donald J. Waters, program officer for scholarly communications and information technology at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, has built on a presentation given at ARL’s May 2013 Membership Meeting, and graciously agreed to publish his paper in *Research Library Issues*. His treatise, “An Overview of the Digital Humanities,” encourages readers to consider the defining feature of the digital humanities as the “application of digital resources and methods to humanistic inquiry.” Waters questions why digital humanities require a “special marker” or special attention when other forms of humanistic inquiry do not. Through examples he shares his observations about the future trajectory of the digital humanities and investments that universities and libraries might consider.

Readers might also find two other ARL publications helpful:

- *Digital Humanities*, SPEC Kit 326 (November 2011), by Tim Bryson, Miriam Posner, Alain St. Pierre, and Stewart Varner, <http://publications.arl.org/Digital-Humanities-SPEC-Kit-326/>
- *New Roles for New Times: Transforming Liaison Roles in Research Libraries* (August 2013), by Janice M. Jaguszewski and Karen Williams, <http://www.arl.org/nrnt-liaisons>

As the digital humanities are capturing the virtual space of humanistic inquiry, library physical spaces are capturing the interests of incoming students and are incubating learning for future scholars and scientists.

Spaces as they are tied to library roles, collections, and services are of great interest to libraries. As roles, collections, and services have changed, the configuration of library space has evolved to more effectively meet these needs. New and different types of spaces are becoming more prevalent in libraries and new

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and different campus partnerships have been created. The second article in this issue, “Library Space Assessment: Focusing on Learning,” discusses the analysis of library space and its critical connection to student learning. Joan K. Lippincott, associate executive director at the Coalition for Networked Information, and Kim Duckett, associate head of digital technologies and learning in Research and Information Services at North Carolina State University Libraries, show the importance of collecting meaningful data that supports the creation of new or renovated learning spaces. They suggest that libraries approach an assessment process using a broader perspective by asking key questions such as “what elements of the library renovation and newly configured services would support student success?” This article is a good companion to the Learning Space Toolkit (<http://learningspacetoolkit.org/>). Finally, the authors conclude that the connection between student learning and library spaces needs further exploration and research to provide a deeper understanding of the inherent value of library learning spaces.

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