

Humanities Arts and Social Sciences – Data Enhanced Virtual Laboratory

# Digital Humanities Case Studies: Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Author: Dr Joanne Mihelcic  
Email: [joanne.mihelcic@gmail.com](mailto:joanne.mihelcic@gmail.com)

FINAL REPORT  
26 April 2019

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Overview and summary .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1	Method.....	6
1.2	Findings .....	6
<b>2</b>	<b>The Theatre and Dance Platform.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1	About the project, partners and stakeholders ... <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>	
2.2	Building infrastructure: purpose of the platform <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>	
2.3	Purpose of collection/platform and potential uses <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>	
2.4	Scope of the Datasets .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
2.5	Managing copyright, gifts and donation agreements .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>TrISMA .....</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1	About the project, partners and stakeholders ... <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>	
3.2	Building infrastructure: moving from project to operational funding model <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>	
3.3	Purpose of data and potential uses .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.4	Scope of the Datasets .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
3.5	Ethics and Accreditation Requirements .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Lessons Learned .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>7</b>
5.1	Develop roadmap template for sustainability in eResearch.....	8
5.1.1	Designing research within and for the disciplinary context.....	8
5.1.2	Planning, designing the data collection, collections, content and metadata.....	9
5.1.3	Researchers, investigators and practitioners .....	9
5.1.4	Researching with data and records: creating data or reusing .....	9
5.1.5	Understanding the processes and issues around secondary data analysis.....	9
5.1.6	Resources and guidance for working with cultural and data sensitivity.....	9
5.1.7	Theoretical, practical, ethical and moral concerns.....	10
5.1.8	Understanding and implementing Copyright, Licenses and Agreements.....	10
5.1.9	Stakeholder engagement and management.....	10
5.1.10	Understanding data and records through metadata and description.....	10
5.1.11	University Policies and Procedures .....	10
5.1.12	Managing gifts and donor relationships .....	11
5.1.13	Funding, budgets and financial planning .....	11
5.1.14	Creating sustainable infrastructure for data management and sharing.....	11
5.1.15	Motivation for creating a digital collection: stakeholders, users and research .....	12
5.1.16	Metadata and description.....	12
5.2	Brokering/ Advisory Service .....	12
5.3	Create a database/register/directory of research projects and associated archives/data/records .....	12

References.....	13
-----------------	----

## ***Scope and intent of this document***

The HASS Data Enhanced Virtual Laboratory project (HASS DEVL) is a collaboration between a range of partner organisations, including AARNet, Alveo, AURIN, Australian Data Archive, eResearch SA Limited, Griffith University, The National Library of Australia, and The University of Melbourne.

The project is focused on supporting researchers working in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. The HASS research community is the largest portion of the Australian research landscape by any measure, commonly understood to comprise more than 40% of current funded research. HASS is a multidisciplinary grouping that represents significant domain specialisation, interdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity.

Since late 2017, the distributed HASS DEVL team has been working on a number of initiatives for HASS researchers, including Tinker (<https://tinker.edu.au/>), national Digital Humanities Pathways Forums, and the training of Digital Champions.

The following documented case studies are an outcome of this project. This is a reference document developed by and for the HASS DEVL project. The document is made available under a Creative Commons Licence and reports the work/progress to date.

Any reference to the work therein should be cited appropriately. The contents of the document are designed to support future project activities such as: online training modules, further case studies and other resources.



CC BY

This work is licensed under the  
Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>  
or send a letter to:  
Creative Commons  
PO Box 1866  
Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

“The greatest danger to digital materials is that we forget the meaning of them. Preservation depends on our knowledge: we may have bits but be unable to interpret them. Keeping knowledge, rather than objects is an organizational problem.”<sup>1</sup>

All that is old becomes new again. According to Bode and Longley Arthur, while there is no singular definition of the digital humanities, scholars and practitioners in the field engage in interdisciplinary collaborations at the intersection of humanities and computing. One of the challenges of defining the digital humanities is the interdisciplinary nature of the work; it raises the question of whether ‘it’ is in itself a discipline or the tools, techniques and data with which researchers undertake digital humanities activities. It is an evolving and contested space; perceived from a range of vantage points and importantly through interdisciplinary theory and practices.

Importantly, there “is the perceived lack of theory in digital humanities.”<sup>2</sup> The digital humanities is a field which is questioning and critiquing its own scholarly contribution and impact.<sup>3</sup> What is the meaning of this work and how do these “arguments and interpretations contribute to knowledge and debates in the broader humanities”?<sup>4</sup>

The use of technologies in the creation and analysis of data is thoroughly embedded in contemporary research practices so how does a digital humanities approach extend the work beyond the boundaries of traditional disciplinary research?

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Lesk, Edward M. Corrado, and Heather L. Moulaison, “Forward,” in *Digital Preservation for Libraries, Archives, and Museum* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), xvi. This quote refers to digital preservation in the context of galleries, archives, libraries and museums (GLAM) but it is equally relevant in a time when, as is the case in the digital humanities, “old media becomes the content of new media”

<sup>2</sup> Edward Vanhoutte, Julianne Nyhan, and Melissa M Terras, eds., *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, n.d., 5.

<sup>3</sup> Vanhoutte, Nyhan, and Terras, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Longley Arthur and Katherine Bode, “Collecting Ourselves,” in *Advancing Digital Humanities: Research, Methods, Theories*, ed. Paul Longley Arthur and Katherine Bode (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 2.

# 1 Overview and summary

Universities globally are experiencing digital transformation which is influencing not only their business administration processes but also the way academic life and work is conducted. While the university has legal and copyright obligations regarding the creation, use and sharing of data, there are also important ethical and moral imperatives which require a transparent and nuanced approach to decision making. Relevant to this work/report is the concept of digital scholarship which is being formed in current contexts.<sup>5</sup> Digital scholarship is driving innovations in the ways we:

- Design and implement methodologies in teaching and research<sup>6</sup>
- Create, curate and use data
- Manage and share research data
- Communicate and publish research outcomes<sup>7</sup>

While universities strive to create innovative and open educational environments there are also strategic drivers to innovate in the use of research data in order to meet social, legal and cultural responsibilities.

The objective of this report is to understand the thinking and processes that the academic community apply in undertaking digital research. In learning from researcher experiences, we have been able to identify key activities, decision points and types of resources that were undertaken in order to determine the achievements, challenges and gaps in resources required to undertake these initiatives. The hope is that this learning can be developed into training and advancement in operational practices to support digital scholarship in the humanities.

The outcome of this study is twofold. This report provides descriptions, analyses and review of two digital humanities projects which were studied as part of the [Humanities Arts and Social Sciences Data Enhanced Virtual Laboratory \(HASS DEVL\)](#) Project.<sup>8</sup> The report

---

<sup>5</sup> Eileen Scanlon, "Digital Scholarship: Identity, Interdisciplinarity, and Openness," *Frontiers in Digital Humanities* 5 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fdigh.2018.00003>.

<sup>6</sup> David M. Berry, ed., *Understanding Digital Humanities* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Scanlon, "Digital Scholarship."

<sup>8</sup> The HASS Data Enhanced Virtual Laboratory project (HASS DEVL) is a collaboration between a range of partner organisations, including AARNet, Alveo, AURIN, Australian Data Archive, eResearch SA Limited, Griffith University, The National Library of Australia, and The University of Melbourne.

contains an overview of these two cases, key findings and recommendations for further work. It also maps out key areas of activity/work/recommendations which could be developed further into work packages to support education and service delivery.

## 1.1 Method

The research for this report involved studying two different projects in Australian Universities.

1. The first project is *Theatre and Dance Platform* (T&DP) at University of Melbourne<sup>9</sup>
2. The second is *Tracking Infrastructure for Social Media Analysis* (TrISMA) at Queensland University of Technology<sup>10</sup>

In-depth interviews were conducted with project leaders to understand the work undertaken in creating infrastructure to support the digital humanities. Importantly this study highlighted the significance of planning and designing the infrastructure to support sharing and reuse of quality data through:

- Original purpose/aims
- Funding models
- Types of data being created and reused
- Scope of infrastructure in its creation and for sharing

## 1.2 Findings

The research and supporting work conducted in digital humanities is varied and situated in diverse disciplinary contexts. There are three key themes which arose from the cases studied in this project in conjunction with wider online research including:

1. **Resources:** Undertaking digital humanities projects requires the delivery of resources, services and support at an operational level. Projects are the product of collaborations

---

The project is focused on supporting researchers working in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. The HASS research community is the largest portion of the Australian research landscape by any measure, commonly understood to comprise more than 40% of current funded research. HASS is a multidisciplinary grouping that represents significant domain specialisation, interdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity.

Since late 2017, the distributed HASS DEVL team has been working on a number of initiatives for HASS researchers, including Tinker (<https://tinker.edu.au/>), national Digital Humanities Pathways Forums, and the training of Digital Champions.

<sup>9</sup> <https://digitised-collections.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/92018>

<sup>10</sup> <https://research.qut.edu.au/dmrc/projects/trisma-tracking-infrastructure-for-social-media-analysis/>

beyond traditional academic practices or research; they involve interdisciplinary partnerships within and often outside of university boundaries.

2. **Knowledge and Skills:** The nature of working across disciplinary boundaries highlights the diverse ways for thinking and doing research as well as the technical or practical skills which academics may or may not be familiar with, especially when building infrastructure.
3. **Sustainable infrastructure:** Digital humanities research requires a ‘whole of life’ project planning process in which the overarching costs and resources are considered for current and future needs. The costs for operationalising the management and sharing of data may extend well beyond the initial research project implementation particularly with organisational and funder drivers to share data.

## 2 The Theatre and Dance Platform

## 3 TrISMA

## 4 Lessons Learned

## 5 Recommendations

There are three key recommendations which emerge from this report listed below and then described in more detail in this section of the report. The recommendations include:

1. Develop a roadmap to support sustainable eResearch in university contexts
2. Implement an advisory or research brokering service to support
3. Create a database or register of research and research data

## **5.1 Develop roadmap template for sustainability in eResearch**

One recommendation, based on the analysis of the cases in this report, is to develop a **Roadmap template for researchers in Digital Humanities and possibly eResearch**. A template such as this would identify and highlight services or support which is both of use and necessary to researchers wishing to do digital humanities research for both researchers and the quality of research. Equally a roadmap could support researchers navigate the operational and academic support when needed.

A roadmap template could be used to guide universities in supporting both researchers and the quality of research. A key challenge noted in conducting this research and report is the lack of transparency in terms of how resources are being used in research contexts; people, financial and operational services. There is no system currently for putting a cost on the services delivered aside from funding associated with a project.

**Finding:** A key challenge noted in conducting this research is the lack of transparency in terms of how resources are being used in research contexts; people, financial and operational services. There is no system currently for calculating the cost of services delivered aside from funding associated with a project.

**Recommendation:** A roadmap template could also be used to guide universities in mapping out where resources are being expended and the possible internal costs.

The following points were identified gaps in researcher knowledge which arose from the cases studied in this report.

**Recommendation:** These topics create the framework for the suggested roadmap.

### **5.1.1 Designing research within and for the disciplinary context**

Design and planning of data in research require an approach which is informed through:

- Identification of [inter]disciplinary contexts, methodologies, data and expected outcomes of the research. Importantly, this will influence and determine the contribution of the broader body of knowledge.
- Defining the research problem and questions
  - What are the research questions and how will a digital humanities approach add to knowledge in the discipline or field?
- Researchers may not be considering the archive or dataset, with inherent theoretical concerns, as a product or outcome in the context of research.



- Does this type of research warrant the inclusion of archival researchers in constructing research questions or interdisciplinary teams?
- How is the creation or use of an archive addressed as practice and using a critical lens i.e. in the exegetical sense?

### **5.1.2 Planning, designing the data collection, collections, content and metadata**

- Describing and representing materials
- Value and meaning
- Understanding genres and type of media

### **5.1.3 Researchers, investigators and practitioners**

- Who are the leading researchers, investigators or practitioners in the context of research?

### **5.1.4 Researching with data and records: creating data or reusing**

- What is the motivation for creating a digital collection: stakeholders, users and research?
- What are the data/records of interest?
- How does the research create new data or reuse existing data?
  - University protocols and guidelines for using and publishing data.

### **5.1.5 Understanding the processes and issues around secondary data analysis**

- What is the design of the research, that is the methodological approach?

### **5.1.6 Resources and guidance for working with cultural and data sensitivity**

- Does the data include culturally sensitive data or records?
- What are the available resources which guide the research[ers] in relation to cultural and data sensitivity?

The management and use of indigenous records is a sensitive and cultural concern which should be conducted in relationship/consultation with the communities to whom these records pertain. What are the existing forums within the university for seeking counsel re affected community and their representatives?

### **5.1.7 Theoretical, practical, ethical and moral concerns**

What are the processes and procedures for secondary data analysis i.e. guidelines, licencing, citation and ethics?

### **5.1.8 Understanding and implementing Copyright, Licenses and Agreements**

Copyright management as well as the negotiation of licenses and agreements are highly specialised legal areas which potentially impact on research, researchers, organisations and partners or stakeholders. These issues may also overlap with ethics/ethical requirements. Discussions occurred between these parties regarding the migration of the Lucy Guerin Inc. Archive to the UoM, though this has not been formally documented.

### **5.1.9 Stakeholder engagement and management**

Stakeholder engagement may require community participation, advocating and seeking counsel

### **5.1.10 Understanding data and records through metadata and description**

- Understanding the importance of archives, records, metadata and description.
  - What are existing standards, research or models which can be applied?

### **5.1.11 University Policies and Procedures**

Many archives and other collecting institutions will have their own policies, guidelines and procedures for collections development which fit with the organisation's strategy and purpose. The University Library Collection Development/Management is a suite of documents referring to resources, guidelines, processes and workflow for creating digitised collection at the University of Melbourne.<sup>11</sup> These documents highlight that the collections should:

- Support teaching, learning and research
- Be accessible
- Deliver unique contributions to the collections of other bodies – not duplicating what is done elsewhere

---

<sup>11</sup>[https://wiki.unimelb.edu.au/download/attachments/82703491/Creating%20Digital%20Collections\\_2018.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1531377176000&api=v2;https://wiki.unimelb.edu.au/spaces/viewspace.action?key=DC](https://wiki.unimelb.edu.au/download/attachments/82703491/Creating%20Digital%20Collections_2018.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1531377176000&api=v2;https://wiki.unimelb.edu.au/spaces/viewspace.action?key=DC)

### **5.1.12 Managing gifts and donor relationships**

- Acquiring archives is generally conducted via legally binding agreement called the “Deed of Gift”. There are potential legal and contractual obligations that need to be both articulated and documented in relation to records and archives which are provided to the University and determine how the gift is to be used or managed.
- What are the moral as well as ethical requirements in working with and possibly sharing data?
- Create opportunities for pilot (sandbox) projects to be developed before data goes “live”.
  - Consider what the evaluation criteria/process would be before publishing a digital humanities project.
- What are considerations for designing sustainable infrastructure and datasets: from project to becoming operational?
  - “Whole Life Costing” or “Life Cycle Costing” are terms which describe the need to identify, plan and budget for the project costs involved in implementing a project and the future costs which entail the cost of operationalising and maintaining a service.

### **5.1.13 Funding, budgets and financial planning**

- Develop an accessible model for understanding and funding a digital humanities initiative.
- What are some of the funding sources i.e. Linkage Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities scheme (LIEF) Australian Government, Australian Research Council

### **5.1.14 Creating sustainable infrastructure for data management and sharing**

#### **5.1.14.1 Funding and funding sources**

- What are the funding sources and associated obligations that need to be met especially if a project is being funded for the purpose of developing infrastructure?

#### **5.1.14.2 Infrastructure and technology**

### **5.1.15 Motivation for creating a digital collection: stakeholders, users and research**

### **5.1.16 Metadata and description**

Understanding metadata and schemas

## **5.2 *Brokering/Advisory Service***

The complex nature of creating, managing and sharing infrastructure in these types of digital humanities projects requires extensive resources which may or may not be known to researchers.

**Recommendation:** Create a role which provides brokering service and facilitates a roadmap or service delivery approach to help researchers navigate existing projects, services, support and funding opportunities across the institution.

## **5.3 *Create a database/register/directory of research projects and associated archives/data/records***

There are strategic drivers both in institutions and funding bodies to create sharable research and data sets, yet organisational knowledge, of exactly what research or data is being created or where it exists, is often held in individual faculties, projects and with the researchers. This situation highlights the need for creating a centralised, relational database and register which captures projects at their inception. At a minimum this register could contain the names of researchers (including PhD), project title and associated funding source.

While this information seems minimal it would enable the institution/university to identify where and with whom data might be. It could be used to conduct preliminary audits for the quantity, qualities and scope of research data. This data would help project the gaps or needs in designing systems which work for both research and operational contexts.

**Recommendation:** Use existing systems/archives within the university for capturing the initiation of a project as a way of tracking who and where research data is being created in relationship to the published outcomes.

## References

- Berry, David M., ed. *Understanding Digital Humanities*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Bunyan, Marcus. “Contemporary Australian Cultural Practices — Australian Centre.” Faculty of Arts, January 7, 2019. <https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/australian-centre/research/contemporary>.
- . “Digital Studio.” Faculty of Arts, January 10, 2019. <https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/research/digital-studio>.
- Council, Australian Research. “Linkage Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities (LIEF).” Text, June 1, 2018. <https://www.arc.gov.au/grants/linkage-program/linkage-infrastructure-equipment-and-facilities>.
- “Digital Storytelling for Significant Places.” Digital Heritage Australia. Accessed December 4, 2018. <http://digitalheritageaustralia.com/>.
- Lesk, Michael, Edward M. Corrado, and Heather L. Moulaison. “Forward.” In *Digital Preservation for Libraries, Archives, and Museum*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.
- Longley Arthur, Paul, and Katherine Bode. “Collecting Ourselves.” In *Advancing Digital Humanities: Research, Methods, Theories*, edited by Paul Longley Arthur and Katherine Bode. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014.
- Scanlon, Eileen. “Digital Scholarship: Identity, Interdisciplinarity, and Openness.” *Frontiers in Digital Humanities* 5 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fdigh.2018.00003>.
- “The Rowden White Library.” Accessed November 26, 2018. <https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/studentlife/library/>.
- “Theatre and Dance Platform.” Accessed December 7, 2018. <https://digitised-collections.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/92018>.
- Vanhoutte, Edward, Julianne Nyhan, and Melissa M Terras, eds. *Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader*, n.d.
- Villareal, Wil. “The University Copyright Office.” The University of Melbourne Copyright Office, March 20, 2018. <https://copyright.unimelb.edu.au/home>.