White Paper Report

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Project: "Digital Cultural Mapping: Transformative Scholarship and Teaching in the Geospatial Humanities" – NEH Summer Institute for Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities

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The Summer Institute:

The purpose of the Institute was to bring together a cohort of 12 Humanities scholars and advanced graduate students across various disciplines to develop innovative approaches to research and publishing in the "geospatial Humanities." The summer Institute took place from June 18-July 6, 2012, at UCLA. The Institute targeted scholars at all stages of their careers who were actively engaged in digitally enabled research and who were currently preparing digital publications and/or teaching courses that relied on geospatial analysis, mapping, and/or geotemporal argumentation. The Institute was primarily focused on helping scholars bring mature research projects to a state in which they can be submitted to journals and presses for peer review and eventual publication. A large component of the Institute focused on evaluating digital scholarship through conversations with key representatives from university presses, professional associations, and leading journals. The Institute was less an introduction to GIS and geospatial digital tools than it was a hands-on opportunity to work closely with faculty and staff affiliated with UCLA's Digital Humanities program in order to prepare scholarly research in the geospatial Humanities for peer review and submission to presses and journals. The HyperCities platform, the Scalar platform, and various geo-visualization tools figured centrally in the Institute. The faculty co-directors and Institute participants collaborated directly with the HyperCities technical team, the UCLA Library, the Center for Digital Humanities, and the visiting faculty and editors to develop innovative frameworks for conceiving of, implementing, and evaluating projects produced by the Institute participants.

The Institute was hosted in the UCLA Library's state-of-the-art Research Commons, with branch classes in the Visualization Portal and "Technology Sandbox" at UCLA's Institute for Digital Research and Education. The Research Commons is specifically configured for collaborative work, and this was a central mandate of the summer Institute. Through "pods" that allowed participants to work with key staff and faculty in small groups, each project was advanced over the course of the three-week institute. Group meetings took place in the Research Commons classroom, a flexible space for large group presentations and conversations. Participants were all given laptops for exclusive use during the Institute, outfitted with a wide variety of computer modeling, GIS, visualization, archiving, and graphics applications including Multigen Creator, ArcGIS/ArcMap, Maya, 3D Studio Max, Rhino 3D, Maxwell Render, Sketchup, Google Earth, Adobe Creative Suite, Gephi, and others.

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The full syllabus for the Summer Institute can be found here: http://hypercities.com/NEH/schedule/.   The three weeks were divided up as follows: the first week was dedicated to introducing the central issues in the field of geospatial humanities, including key projects, practitioners, methodological approaches, and readings, as well as learning the key tools (mapping tools such as HyperCities, Google Maps/Earth, basic GIS, Sketch-up, and the nuts and bolts of KML). The second week was entirely hands-on, in which faculty, technology staff, and participants worked intensively on realizing their projects and focused on design production. Here, we instituted a series of "tool time" labs focused on topics such as geo-rectification, GIS, and data visualization. In the third week, we convened a colloquium on the future of digital publishing, which included two days of peer review and project discussion. We had a two-way dialogue between the Institute participants and a group of editors, publishers, and librarians working on innovative platforms for geospatial humanities scholarship. The impact and evaluation process went in both directions: Editors, publishers, and librarians evaluated the digital projects created by Institute participants, discussing possible criteria by which such projects may be judged, reviewed, and archived; and participants evaluated existing publication and archiving platforms and discussed how they might be transformed to better accommodate multimodal, geo-temporal scholarship. These stakeholders were: Mary Francis, media studies editor, University of California Press; Philip Ethington, Professor of History at USC, and North American and Multimedia Editor of *Urban History* (Cambridge Journals Online); Nancy Levinson, Executive editor of the on-line journal *Places*; Tara McPherson, Professor of Cinema Studies at USC, and Editor of *Vectors* and *Scalar*; Kazys Varnelis, Director of the Network Architecture Lab at the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation and Multimedia Editor of the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*; and Marta Brunner, UCLA Digital Humanities Research Librarian and strategic advisor to the Open Humanities Press.

The Results:

The 12 Institute participants all made significant headway on their projects during the Institute and most received consultative advice over the following year focused on project support, publication support, and curriculum development. Some highlights since the Institute include: Three participants landed tenure-track positions in Digital Humanities and several others have instituted DH courses and/or curricular tracks at their home institutes. Institute faculty and members of the technical team have consulted with these faculty, sharing syllabi, advising on course development, and (in one case) participating in a two-day workshop at their home institution. Several participants have published major articles or parts of their projects in HyperCities, Scalar, *Places*, *Grey Room*, and other venues; one participant won the coveted Rome Prize for his research initiated at the Institute (and published in HyperCities). In the wake of the Institute, three affiliated faculty and staff members also published a major book about geo-spatial mapping, *HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities* (Harvard University Press, 2014), which drew on the lessons, methods, and curriculum developed at the Institute. Finally, UCLA recently developed a graduate certificate program in "Urban Humanities," which blends digital humanities methodologies with urban planning and architecture. The core course for this program is a summer institute for graduate students, modeled directly off the NEH summer institute in Digital Humanities.

What Worked:

- Pre-institute meetings were critical. Since we intended participants to make steady progress on an already existing digital project, it was critical that the Institute leaders and technical staff were familiar with the project before the participants arrived and that we understood the technical needs. To that end, we had 30-45 minute skype conversations with each participant ahead of time and asked them to fill out a data questionnaire. We also asked them to submit any datasets to us ahead of time, so that we could upload them to a shared drive and also make sure they were compatible with the software applications we were using. This was particularly important for participants who had GIS data or data that they wanted to visualize on a map. We also sought to digitize and geo-rectify some maps ahead of time for participants.
- Enough staffing for one-on-one project work was critical: During the second week of the institute, we had 10 staff members working with Institute participants. This including staff from our Center for Digital Humanities, the core faculty, and several undergraduate interns proficient with GIS. Having enough people on the ground to problem-solve issues and address technical needs was vital for the participants to make progress. In the future, we would hire even more undergraduate or graduate students from our DH program to help staff the "making" sessions of the Institute.
- The flexible library spaces facilitated group learning and collaboration: Having everyone "see" each other working and also "overhear" conversations allowed participations to learn about each other's projects and also learn together (especially when certain technologies were needed by more than one project).
- The final colloquium with stakeholders in publishing and libraries was consistently praised in the Institute evaluations. It resulted in a number of tangible publications and collaborations (which are enumerated in the final NEH report). Helping situate the work of the institute participants within a broader community of practitioners and stakeholders was a positive outcome for everyone involved. We suggest that this is critical measure of the impact of the Summer Institutes.

What could be improved:

- Having 11 separate projects with varied technical needs was a challenge. Not only were the projects tailored to an individual's specific research, but they were also at various stages of development (some quite advanced and others still in an early conceptual or exploratory phase). While this is not a problem in itself, we found a new model emerge in two projects: namely, a team-based approach. In one such project, the professor applied to the Institute with a member of his technical team (a librarian well-versed in DH) and both participated in the three-week institute as a "mini-team." In a second case, a professor brought his collaborator to the Institute in the second, "hands-on" week. In both cases, the team-based approach allowed these projects to make huge leaps, conceptually and technically. While individual faculty members certainly gained a lot from the Institute, the NEH might consider more formalized

ways to expressly support and encourage such team-based approaches to projects. In addition to being beneficial during the Institute, it also allows for continuity after the Institute is over.

- In the evaluations, many of the participants wanted a more formalized "follow-up" event, such as a conference or even a subsequent Institute dedicated to delving further into geo-spatial tools and digital publishing. We didn't budget for that, nor did we acknowledge the need for formally maintaining the intensely productive network that formed during the Institute. While we have followed up with most of the participants and provided ongoing consultative advice and even program-building support to some participants, we have not been able to maintain the cohesion of the group. Perhaps using social media more aggressively would be one way to address this (maybe a Facebook group or sustained twitter discussions). We would suggest building a social media component into the project *after* the Institute (not just during the institute, as we did).