

# Supporting Digital Humanities in the Library:

## CREATING SUSTAINABLE & SCALABLE SERVICES

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# Background: Mid 2000s

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First, I'll give you a little background to contextualize our research project. In the mid 2000s...

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NYU Libraries and NYU Information Technology Services were feeling a certain amount of...

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frustration because of our conflicting desires to create robust and scalable...



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Enterprise  
NASA  
United States

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enterprise-level, generic tools that would meet the academic and administrative needs of a majority of our tens of thousands of students and faculty, while at the same time...

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!!!@#\*!!



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Trying to give scholars customized support for their web-based projects.



Like many other research institutions, we rolled out enterprise-level tools...

LMS

Wikis

Email, Calendar

Video Streaming

Shared File Storage

Virtual Computer Lab

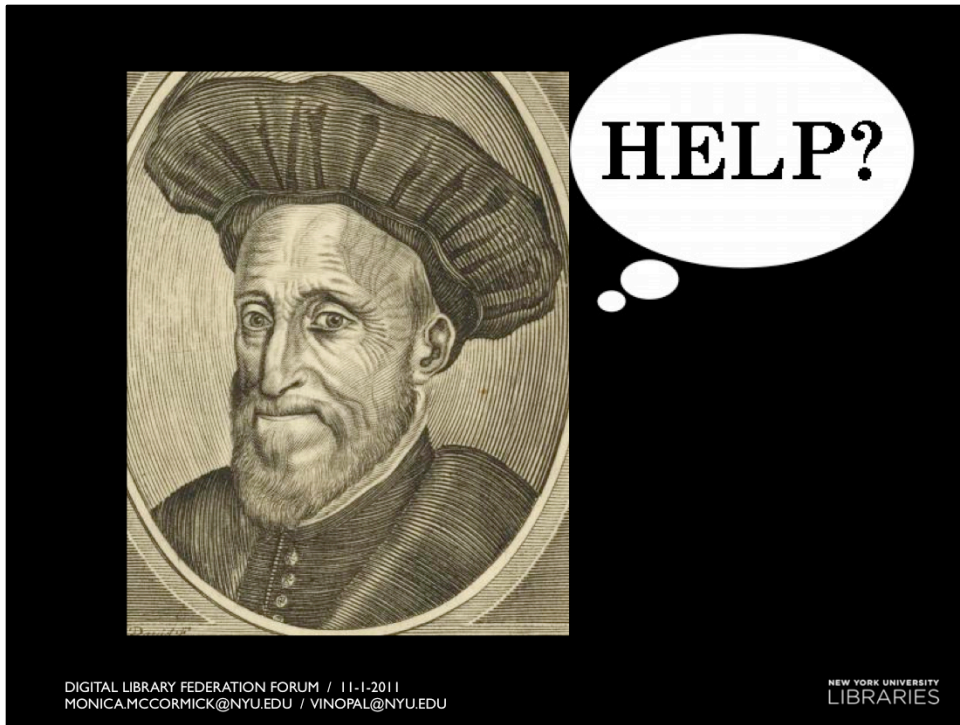
Institutional Repository



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that are designed to meet the basic academic and administrative needs of a large number of our faculty and students.



But as for scholars needing more customized support...



Well, we have lots of diverse faculty needs and requests for custom-built projects. But we are currently responding (if we respond at all) in an uncoordinated and unsustainable way.

[Photo credit: wetwebwork via Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/wetwebwork/141617796/in/photostream/>]



For Carol Mandel, NYU Dean of Libraries, figuring out how to support new web-based forms of collaboration, communication, and publishing is a high-level, strategic priority.

Last spring she asked us Monica and me...



to investigate how such services are offered at other universities and to better define NYU faculty's needs;



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&  
SUSTAINABLE!**

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and to then propose a scalable and sustainable service model(s) that might be adopted by NYU Libraries.



So we turned to our peer community as well as to the NYU community for help.



In spring 2011 we started by talking to peer institutions to see how they do it.

These are gross generalizations, but we observed that the organizations we talked to pointed to three general types of service models:

1. Digital Humanities centers (scholar-driven with a strong R&D component);
2. Digital research & publishing services (focus on scalability, or first-of-a-kind rather than one-of-a-kind projects); [Thanks to Rebecca Kennison of Columbia for this useful distinction between one-of-a-kind and first-of-a-kind projects]
3. Orgs that focus on digitizing library collections (library collection driven, focus on building infrastructure)

Again, these are gross generalizations and no single service model I mention here fully describes any of the organizations we spoke to. We're just pointing to trends.



This past summer we partnered with Subject Specialists to identify NYU faculty who are engaged in thinking about or experimenting with technology for their research and publishing.

In October we and the appropriate subject specialists interviewed the faculty.

What do faculty want?

## NYU Faculty Want:

- Online collaborative workspaces (multimedia, annotation, etc.)
- Online exhibits (image, audio, video)
- Database-driven websites
- Conference websites
- Secure working & longterm storage
- Video/audio for lectures, projects

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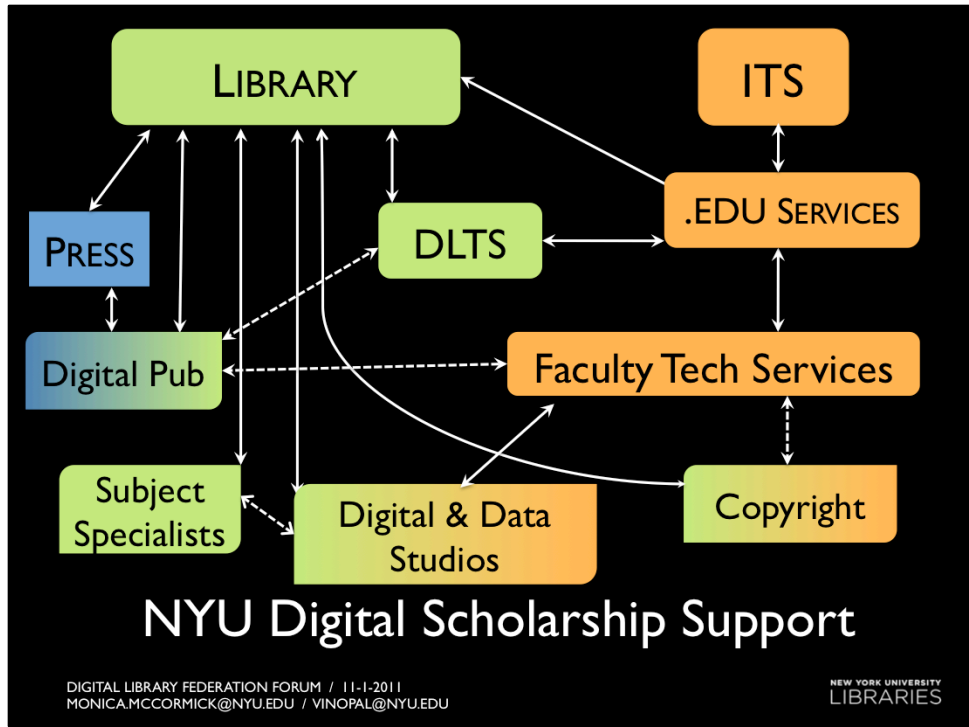
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Lots of stuff:

But, in a nutshell: they want the university to supply them with programmers to build them websites and lots of storage to manage their stuff.

These are complex demands.

And...



How could we begin to help them?

Look at our org structure: this is a high-level overview representing Libraries, Press, and campus ITS

It's a complex service environment.

We have lots of excellent services, some are nascent or under-developed. But there's also a lack of integration among these different services. We're not working in concert.

It's not only hard for a user to navigate this complex service landscape, but for staff as well.

What we need is a viable service model and to create a shared vision for providing services to support new-model scholarly communication

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For the research scholar, what we really want to offer is this...



... a clear path to whatever services we *\*do\** currently or will eventually provide.

(Note: the color gradient is meant to represent our vision of NYU Libraries, Press, ITS working together!)

Here are some components of what a *\*possible\** service model might look like (note: NYU has not adopted this model):





As we said before, many basic academic and administrative needs are met by enterprise tools.

But many research needs remain unfulfilled.



Various units -- Digital Library Technology Services, High Performance Computing, Data Service Studio, etc. -- are currently working to create generalizable research tools such as...

**Standardized Research Services**

- New-model pub. platforms
- Smarter research repositories
- Integration w/ enterprise tools

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- A more generic and standardized version of the MediaCommons platform that NYU's DLTS has developed, that could meet scholars' needs for web-based publishing venues and collaborative community sites;
- Smarter repositories, e.g., low-latency, high speed working storage, with a focus on collaboration
- Integration of these services with our enterprise tools: e.g., mashup of Dspace + Sakai + grouper

At this point the tools and integration for some services in this category are in development.

However current user support \*services\* for these tools are pretty much non-existent.

Standardized  
Research  
Services

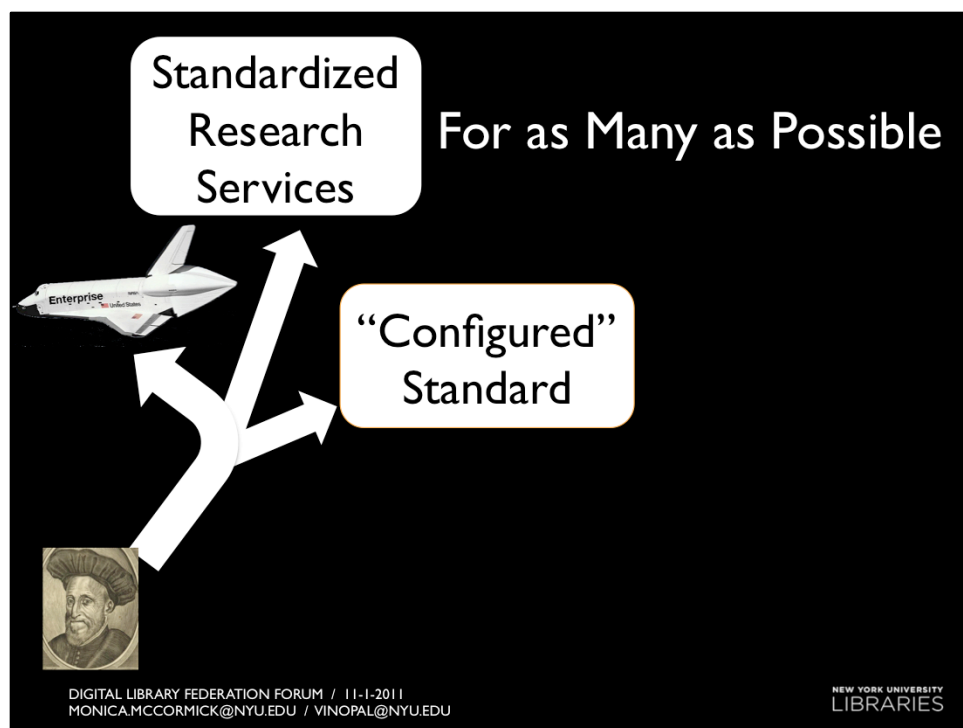
For as Many as Possible



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We hope to make these generic research tools, platforms, and user support services as generalizable and scalable as possible and thus available to as many scholars as we can.



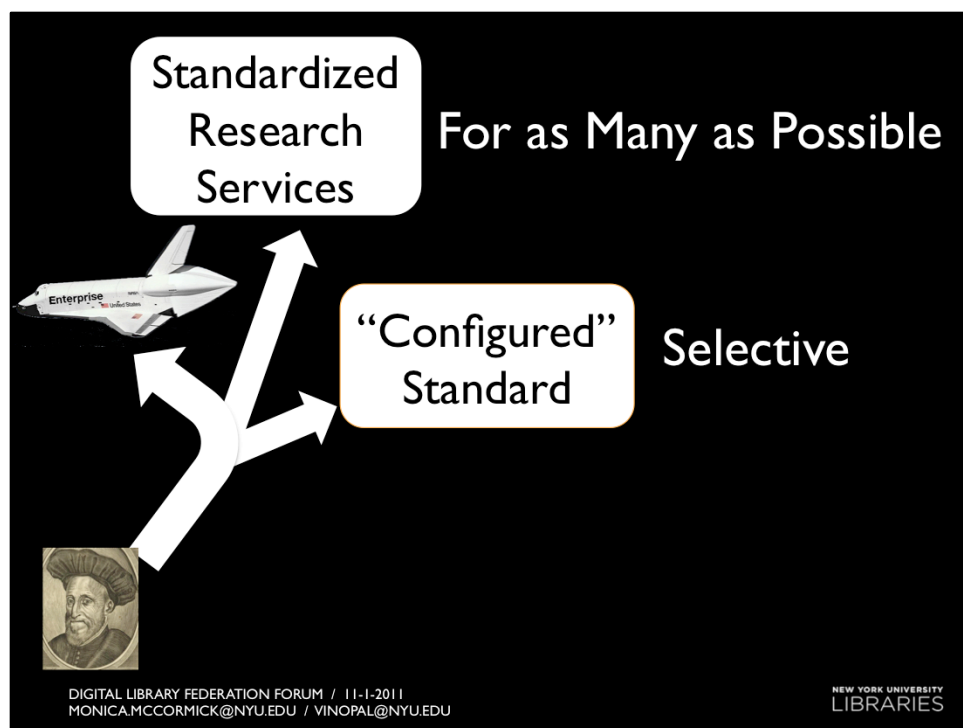
A second tier of service: would include the ability to provide some custom configuration of the \*standardized\* research services. (Note that these proposed service levels are all interlinked and build on each other)



Configuration options for standardized services might include:

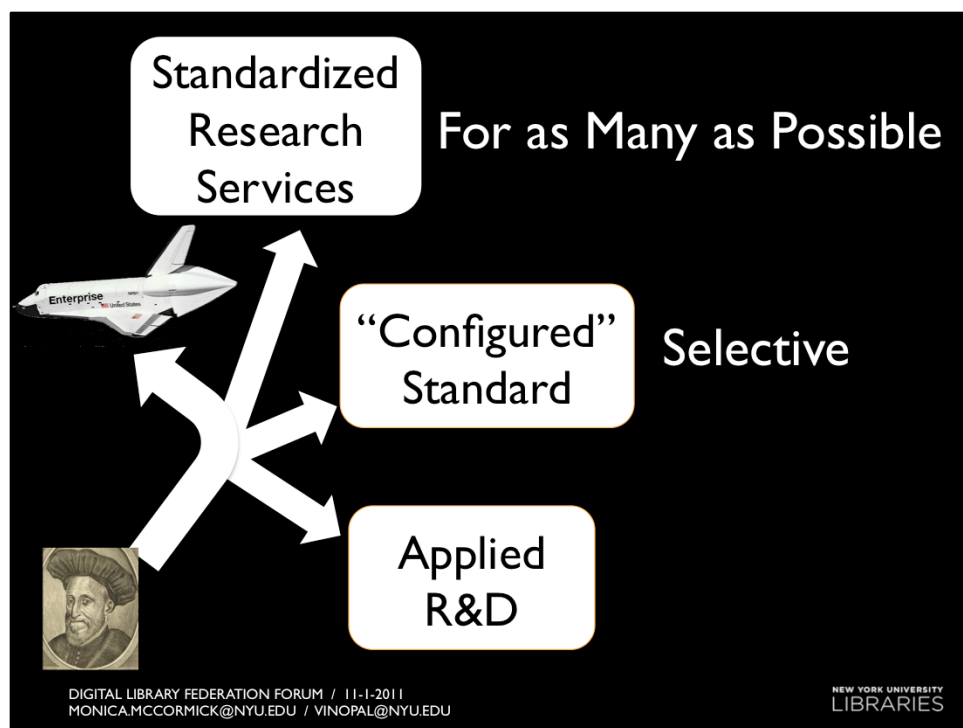
- Skinning the user interface to a standard tool in order to make it \*look\* customized,
- providing a more custom-tailored DMD input interface to a repository (rather than using the out-of-the-box DMD input configuration)
- Having a staff member with special skills do bulk uploads, metadata transformations, or special processing of a scholar’s collection.

We’re already doing some of this, for example, for select collections going into our Institutional Repository.



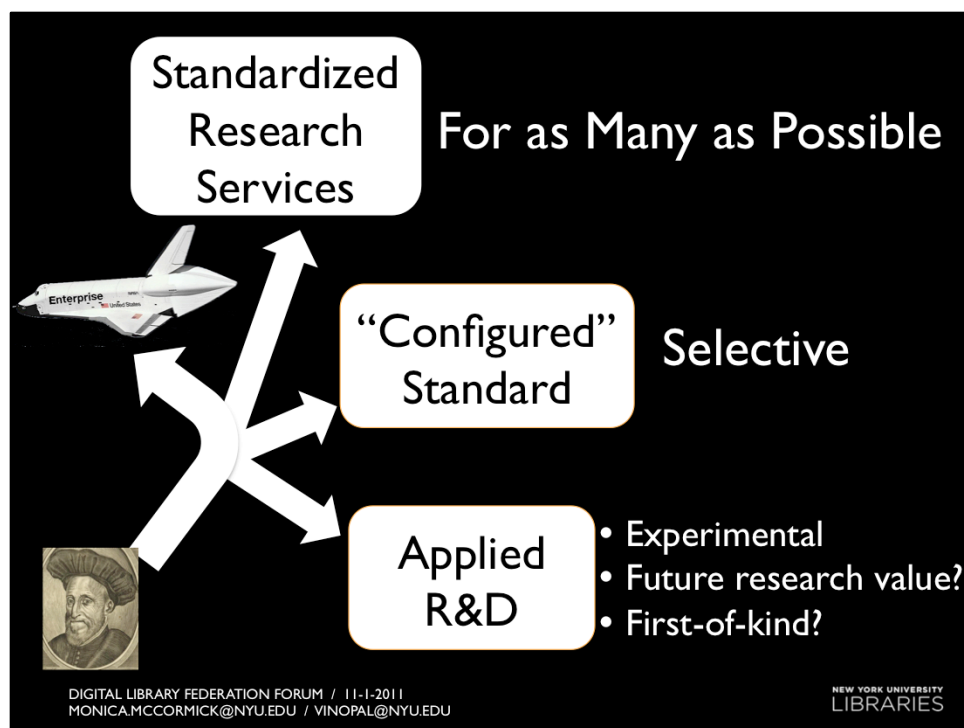
Though the goal would always be to help as many scholars as possible, access to this level of service, requiring more staff time & support, would be more selective.

Depending on demand, we may need to develop a process for evaluating and selecting among proposed projects, or follow Columbia U's CDRS's lead and develop a for-fee model.



The 4<sup>th</sup> service category – Applied R&D -- would build on our Digital Library Technology Service’s R&D activities, as well as other development initiatives at NYU Libraries and ITS.

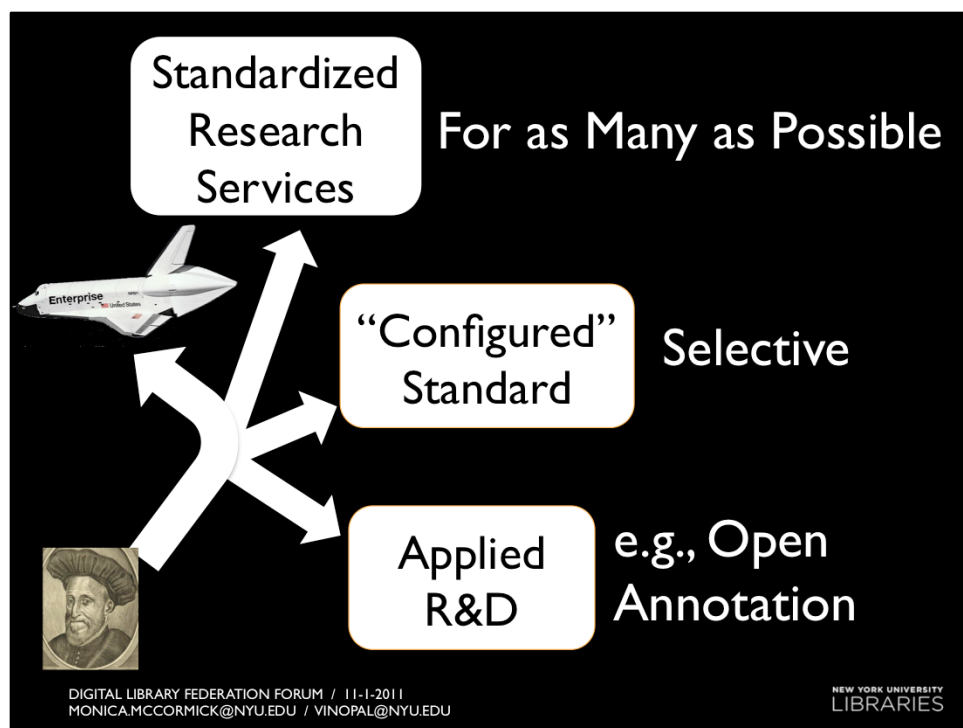




This work is more experimental and focused on developing methods and infrastructure with possible (but not certain) future research value.

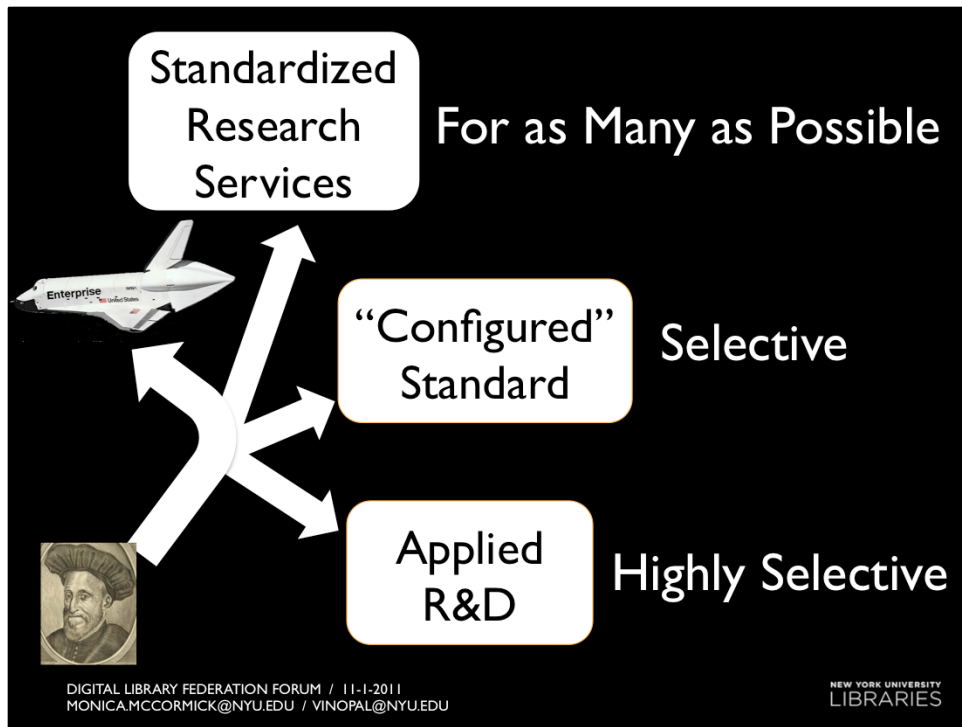
This work would hopefully lead to reusable products or integration among existing tools.

The products developed ideally would then be rolled out as “Standardized Research Services”, thereby completing the development and roll-out loop in this model.

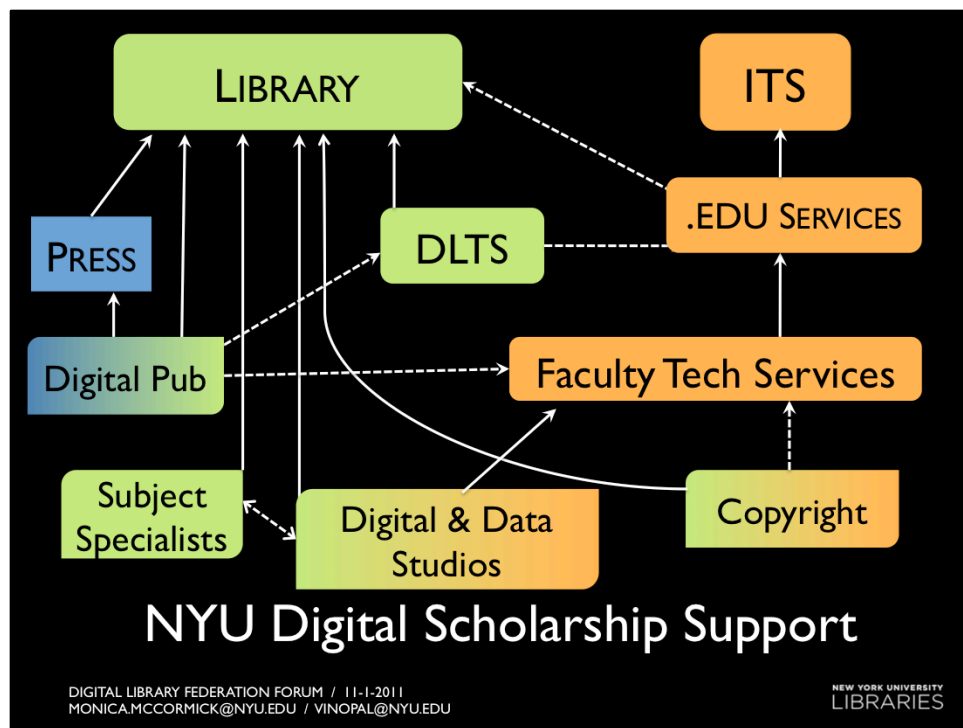


One example: the Open Annotation Collaboration project that DLTS is working on with the University of MD, U of Illinois, LANL, U of Queensland.

Another example: The Media Commons platform that NYU created, which started as R&D and which we hope will eventually become a standardized research service.



Obviously this work is highly selective, mostly grant-funded, and extremely staff intensive.



For Monica and me: Our current project goal is to devise and propose a way to conceptualize and describe this potential suite of research services...

And eventually help to make our current complex, multi-dimensional, and disaggregated organization...

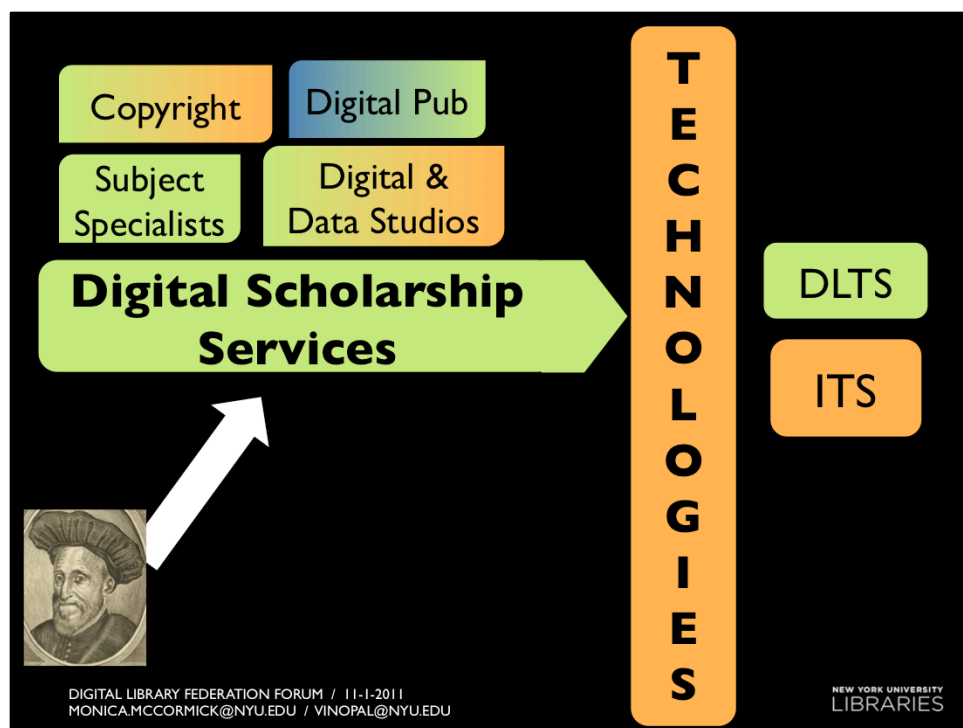
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Services**

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...look more like this from the user's perspective.



With our various units working in unison, with a shared vision, to create a coherent public service.

We believe the biggest challenge to realizing this vision is organizational...

## Organizational Challenges:

- Create shared vision.
- Develop staff knowledge/skills.
- Develop prioritization process.
- Maintain shared priorities.
- VIP projects that don't fit service model?
- Leadership role on campus?

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We'll leave you with a list of what we think would be our biggest challenges in realizing this potential service model.

Thank you

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