Digitally Mapping the Buddhist Holy Land: Intercultural Communication, Religious History, and Networked Rhetoric

Derek F. Maher
East Carolina University

Guiseppe Getto
East Carolina University

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Introduction

Intercultural communication presents an array of well-known and much-discussed challenges, including the difficulties of engaging in productive dialogues regarding cultural assumptions, the problems of translation, tensions between macro-level value systems and the uniqueness of individual cultures, and challenges to developing communication technologies that are culturally appropriate (Kostelnick, 1995; Maylath, 1997; Thatcher, 2006; Sun, 2012). When addressing the diverse dimensions of religious culture, there is the added obstacle that understanding another's religion can sometimes become entwined with how people feel about their own deeply held religious values and assumptions (Jackson, 2004). Special obstacles to understanding can arise in relation to religion because an individual's own religious truth claims may prevent them from coming to terms with how another religion orders the world. For this reason, faculty members teaching American university students about less familiar religions frequently find they need to attend to sophisticated methodological and epistemological considerations in the instructional context, even from an introductory level. Special efforts are needed to help students learn to engage diverse perspectives, especially when they are quite different from their own.

Likewise, the transmission of academic research in disciplines—such as religious studies, technical and professional communication, and digital humanities—depends upon communications across diverse cultural boundaries. These boundaries can include those encountered by Euro- and North American scholars reading Asian languages, translating texts, and communicating with indigenous informants. Equally, they can involve cases in which scholarly production about Asian religions is shared with individuals in the Asian context about which the scholarly literature is being produced. Likewise, the boundaries can be crossed when scholars of Buddhism find themselves communicating with scholars of Christianity or Judaism

about intercultural religious themes (Geertz, 1974). Finally, these boundary-crossing activities are becoming increasingly technical and digital: communication deliverables ranging from simple websites to interactive story maps (http://storymaps.arcgis.com/en/) are becoming important venues for sharing, collaborating, and creating new knowledge in these disciplines. Therefore, instruction, research, and the transmission of scholarly knowledge all involve special forms of cultural translation, and attention to both ways of knowing and means of communicating become crucial (Mao, 2006; Ogan, 2007; Matsunaga & Torigoe, 2008; Day & Frye, 2011; Duin & Moses, 2015).

In the field of technical and professional communication (TPC), as new efforts are made to the bridge the gap between U.S. cultures and communication practices and those from non-U.S. locales, the truth claims associated with religions from across the globe will necessarily be brought into the mix. This is because, following Barry Thatcher (2010), "the predominant local approaches present serious challenges to overcome with global inquiry in rhetoric and professional communication, including ethnocentrism, validity of constructs, conceptualization of global-local dynamics, balance and fairness for cultures being examined, and ethics" (p. 11). By "predominant local approaches," Thatcher means approaches to intercultural theory and practice that assume a one-off, local-only model of culture and communication. In place of these approaches, Thatcher argued for an etic, then emic approach to intercultural inquiry, by which he means that broad conceptual frames should be developed that can be applied across cultures, and then the study of local cultures via these frames should improve and qualify them (p. 13). As a key venue for personal and cultural belief systems, traditions, and practices worldwide, religion is a category that TPC scholars must contend with in the etic sense, meaning that we need to develop frameworks for studying religion that can then be used to investigate local cultures.

In the wake of such challenges, we present an exploratory methodology behind a new research and instructional program that utilizes versatile digital tools and best practices from religious studies, digital humanities, and technical and professional communication. This article addresses both pedagogical considerations and broader methodological concerns in research in order to address many of these challenges. Over the past decade, a longstanding study abroad program has enabled one hundred and seventy students from a large public university in the southern United States to study diverse religions in India and sometimes also Nepal in a four-to-five-week program. In a new approach to the program, a semester-long preparatory course has been developed to instruct students in Buddhism, religious studies, and key methods of the digital humanities in the semester prior to the journey to South Asia. Student teams formed during the spring semester study individual Buddhist holy sites, develop research plans, and collaboratively organize their research into standard formats developed by the professor for publication on the web. This process begins in a classroom in the southern United States, traverses the summer program in India and Nepal when students systematically study and document their individual sites through geospatially-tagged multimedia data, and includes digital communication in the form of an interactive website. Below we explore the theory behind this research methodology, the pedagogical considerations that stem from it, and the design considerations that underlie it.

Tracing cultural impacts: Interweaving three traditions

From a theoretical standpoint, we drew on three main traditions to develop a methodology for including students in a complex intercultural and digital humanities research project. The first is networked rhetoric, a rhetorical approach to studying and intervening in networks (Getto, et al., forthcoming). Networked rhetoric "invites technical communicators to not only work proficiently to help sustain organizational networks, but to act for 'the good of a community' by actively caring for the actors involved in organizational networks and their knowledge-making processes" (Getto, et al., p. 4). This methodology is developed to assist anyone interested in mobilizing complex networks that involve both human and nonhuman actors in order to produce rhetorically-appropriate communication.

Networked rhetoric follows the work of Bruno Latour (2005), who defines an actor as an element of a network that is able to "translate, transform, distort, and modify" any configuration of a network of which it is part (p. 39). To understand the impacts of human and nonhuman actors on a given network's configuration, Latour (2005) has developed an actor-network methodology that has been adopted by several thinkers in the field of technical and professional communication (Johnson-Eilola, 2005; Spinuzzi, 2008; Hart-Davidson, et al., 2008; Potts, 2009). As Clay Spinuzzi (2008) explains, actor-network theory (ANT) provides a political and rhetorical view of networks that foregrounds the continual recruiting of new allies—both human and nonhuman—to strengthen particular network configurations over others (p. 25). What sustains networks is not structural components, then, but the continued impacts of actors on that network.

Next, we drew on the complex conversation collectively known as the digital humanities in developing our methodology for tracing impacts within an intercultural project. Specifically, we drew on digital scholarship at the intersections of rhetoric and space (Michel, et al., 2004; Gochenour, 2011; Bodenhamer, 2015; Ridolfo & Hart-Davidson 2015). Anthony Michel et al. (2004), for instance, developed a multimodal public rhetoric that for them "becomes a space where non-specialists self-reflexively engage in a 'conversation' characterized by the rhetorically effective integration of words, images, sounds and other semiotic elements" (805). Like technical and professional communication scholarship, the digital humanities can be rhetorical in that they often invite new forms of meaning-making with diverse actors, often in public settings. In other words, the accessibility of digital scholarship permits a broader array of participants to engage in the scholarly conversation.

Another clear vein in this admittedly expansive conversation is space. As David Bodenhamer et al. (2015) argues, traditional forms of knowing and meaning making, such as narrative, carry with them a "teleological imperative to explain events as a consequence of past actions or causes and to derive some meaning from the story" (p. 17). Digital humanities scholarship often takes full advantage of the interconnectivity of many different pieces of information, a means of organizing knowledge described by Phillip Gochenour in the evocative term "nodalism" (p. 1). Nodalism is founded on the notion that each actor within a network gains its meaning by way of its place in a complex web of associations with other actors. Likewise, systems of knowledge about a religion, a religious space, or other sufficiently complex topic consist of interwoven and interdependent networks of relationships between elements of information. He remarks:

> Our language is filled with references to the World Wide Web, Internet, social networking, discourse networks, neural networks; all aspects of life, from the structure of the brain, to the thoughts it thinks, to the social and economic life of its individual owner, are described in terms of the node or knot and its connection or association with other nodes and knots. (p. 1)

In the spirit of networked rhetoric, nodalism invites scholars from any discipline to examine associational means of conveying knowledge in public settings.

Adopting a watchful eye regarding the configurations of networks and the rhetorical impacts of scholarly work on public audiences can also be particularly important when developing pedagogies that enable students to assist in the process of participating in networks, especially when those impacts span cultural boundaries (Maylath, 1997; Day & Frye, 2011; Prude, 2013; Duin & Moses, 2015; Siegler, 2015). As Christine Day and Crissy Frye (2011) argue:

> cultural fluency is not simply produced by language fluency.... The flow of the learning, both from and to the instructor and student, also creates a complex dynamic.... [M]ulticultural learners are [thus] in a unique position to enrich the educational experience of all by gaining invaluable information and knowledge about the home country and culture of those learners (p. 35).

Though the context of this quote is obviously teaching in an environment where individual students come from multiple cultures, it is our view that students invited into intercultural situations can also help trace impacts that enrich the educational experience for other students.

In a similar vein, Ann Hill Duin & Joseph Moses' (2015a) pedagogy, they call "intercultural connectivism" uses "student personal learning networks (PLNs) "as a means of operationalizing culture in social contexts by making visible the learners' cultural orientation to knowledge, information, and learning, and by so doing, potentially expanding the learners' intercultural competence" (p. 30). Essentially, intercultural connectivist pedagogy seeks to encourage collaborative knowledge-making across cultural, technological, and individual boundaries. Pushing student-centered models of education into a networked, global age, intercultural connectivism as espoused by Duin & Moses (2015a) critiques the conception of the individual learner, and the conception of the networked classroom as driven by nodes of specialized knowledge that individual learners actively debate. Duin & Moses regard these modes as typifying Western orientations to knowledge. In place of these mono-cultural educational models, they introduce a pedagogy that utilizes personal learning networks as a means of increasing not only knowledge of a course's subject matter, but also technological and cultural fluency.

In a follow-up article, Duin & Moses (2015b) spell out how students can develop such self-reflexive knowledge through constructing maps of their own personal learning networks. These maps enable students to conceptualize their relationship to resources, cultures, and other people in order to advance their understanding of these relationships. Similar to networked rhetoric,

then, in which technical communicators refashion network configurations within organizations to make better use of technological and social resources, intercultural connectivist pedagogy encourages students to reflect on, make conscious, and ultimately revise their personal learning networks in order to facilitate better cultural fluency, learning, and job preparation. Not only does intercultural connectivist pedagogy enable an enriched educational experience for students, in other words, but inviting students to trace their own learning impacts allows them to develop new forms of cultural and professional competence. Moreover, such a pedagogy introduces students to the challenges of communicating across personal, technological, and cultural boundaries that prevail not only in the explication of scholarly research from one religious or social context to another, but also in the business and non-profit sectors of the economy, which are becoming increasingly global and intercultural in scope.

In sum, the methodology we have introduced, which we call "tracing cultural impacts" for short, enables technical communicators, students, and scholars from a variety of disciplines, as well as lay participants in such discourses, to:

1. trace the cultural impacts between human and nonhuman actors within networks;
2. help emphasize certain network configurations over others, such as by designing communication deliverables that meet the needs of specific actors, by translating the needs of particular actors into terms that make sense for other actors, and by keeping a watchful eye on the overall change and development of a specific network's configuration.

We hope it is transparent why these three conversations (TPC, DH, and intercultural connectivism) contributed to a methodology for inviting students and others engaged in scholarly communication to trace cultural impacts. By tracing the impacts of culture within an intercultural space, and then attempting to represent these impacts within an interactive digital forum, those engaged in the scholarly enterprise necessarily draw on skill sets that are at once cultural, digital, and rhetorical. Below we explore this project more in-depth by describing its pedagogical and digital components and by reflecting on how various elements of our methodology influenced our choices.

Using personal learning networks (PLNs) for tracing cultural impacts

In order to make students' orientation to cultural knowledge visible so that they can expand their personal learning networks across cultural boundaries, it's important to adequately prepare students for this transition. Courses that introduce students to intercultural situations should be scaffolded in order to provide students with exposure to knowledge-making practices from various cultures. In their study of faculty and professional trainers teaching courses with a high population (25% or more) of multicultural students, Day and Frye (2011) found a high variance in what instructors are willing to adapt in their pedagogies in order to meet the expectations of multiple cultures. One potential explanation they offer for this phenomenon is the mistaken belief that U.S.-based educational models are always the best for reaching any student population (p. 47). Duin & Moses (2015a) similarly critique Westernized pedagogies as often being dismissive of knowledge-making practices from other cultures (p. 30). Especially when teaching

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in intercultural situations, it is essential to immerse students in multiple cultures to the greatest degree possible in order to foster cultural exchange and fluency.

Going beyond this, students must also have opportunities to trace the impacts of cultural exchanges on their own learning and intellectual growth. In order to foster this kind of mutual and culturally-reciprocal learning environment, the authors collaborated on the development of a prototype website that communicates to a broad audience of scholars, teachers, students, pilgrims, tourists, and others about learning opportunities within the Buddhist holy land. Stemming from a successful study abroad program in which students of East Carolina University who are interested in religious studies and related fields study abroad in India, the project has recently been broadened to involve students in assisting ongoing scholarly work to document the the sacred landscape of the Buddhist holy land. One important deliverable of this work will be a website that will share knowledge gleaned from these efforts with users from around the world. Such a project involves close consideration of the rhetorical impacts of all these audiences on the overall architecture of the website, on one another, and also on the interactions between various cultures.

It is also essential, however, to not immerse students in unfamiliar knowledge-making practices to the degree that they lose all footing. In the current project, for example, students are being invited to develop their own creative ways of describing and documenting a Buddhist holy site of their choosing. This includes instructing students in the implementation of methodologies in both religious studies and the digital humanities and curating information that integrates the students' individual efforts with his or her comprehensive study of the sacred mapping of Buddhism. When engaged in intercultural inquiry of this kind, it is essential to adopt an appropriate level of scaffolding that fosters maximum student engagement with multiple cultures without generating significant student resistance to this engagement.

Students are taught how to create and present knowledge in a home discipline (i.e. religious studies), while at the same time contributing to a major, ongoing research project for all participants. In the current project, student participants are enrolled in a senior-level capstone course each spring semester that is intended to teach advanced research methods to students in the Honors College as well as majors in religious studies, anthropology, geography, computer science, art, photography, filmmaking and related disciplines through which students are likely to be able to make a disciplinary contribution to the project. As the culmination of their undergraduate education and as preparation for graduate school, students are provided a context in which to elaborate sophisticated and sustained research projects with close mentorship; in essence, they are empowered to participate in the scholarly endeavor while being encultured into the research activities employed by professional scholars in their respective fields, and they are able to apply their discipline's methodologies for undertaking research and/or creative activities.

As part of a seven-year research project, starting in the spring of 2016, fourteen to sixteen students from various relevant academic disciplines will be recruited each year to participate in both the spring course and the summer study abroad program supported by the project. Students form research groups based on their common interest in a selected site from the Buddhist holy land, with the number of students per site ranging from two to four, a number determined by the

complexity of the location selected. Groups spend the spring semester researching their location through canonical sources (i.e., sūtras containing the teachings of the Buddha and jātaka tales about the previous lives of the Buddha, circa 4th to 2nd centuries BCE); historical and archeological information about the great early patron of Buddhism, King Aśoka (circa 3rd to 2nd centuries BCE); classic biographies of the Buddha; narratives recording the journeys to India of Chinese pilgrims (circa 4th to 8th centuries CE) and Tibetan pilgrims (circa 17th to 21st centuries CE); archeological studies (19th to 21st centuries CE); and European perspectives on Buddhism and its past (17th to 21st centuries CE).

Each student research group develops story maps (see below, Figures 1 and 2) that integrate temporal and spatial features of the holy site with multimedia resources, photo galleries that are ready to be populated while in India, scripts for videos that will be shot on location, text (including drafts of both extended essays and captions for sites that are expected to be encountered), and an overarching webpage for the site. All of the material is considered to be provisional first drafts that are subject to revision and enhancement once students experience the real locations in Asia, walk through their site, document it, and learn from on-the-ground experience, guides, and locally-derived knowledge.

During the spring semester, each group also devises a detailed research plan outlining how the field research will be conducted on the ground when the group is in India. The plan includes:

- multiple maps created by the team or derived from other sources to identify and itemize each known location;
- a list of assignments for the entire group;
- a grid map defining the zones of the site so that each location is clearly identified;
- a list of items the research group wants to have documented through video, photography, audio, GPS coordinates, and otherwise;
- a shot list for the video(s) to be recorded;
- a set of research questions to be addressed;
- and the library, archive, and museum assets that need to be reviewed while on the ground.

The average amount of time at each location is three days, so students must plan the field research efficiently; the research leaders in each location can rely on about a dozen other researchers at their disposal including their student peers, the faculty director, and his research assistant.

As the itinerary is developed each year, some of the most complicated sites are visited repeatedly, and successive generations of student researchers add supplemental research. For example, both Bōdhgayā and Sārnāth—the site of Buddha's enlightenment and his first teaching, respectively—include significant monuments, monastery ruins, nearby satellite locations, and a large number of more recent monasteries built by Buddhists from around the world. Both also have a variety of institutions for the study and promotion of Buddhism. These sites are tremendously complex, and deep and repeated analysis and documentation are necessary through generations of students.

The subject matter of this research project is easily amenable to examination from diverse scholarly perspectives, and so over time, diverse additional layers of analysis can be added to the project by involving additional departments and their students and faculty members. For example, since the university schedule in the United States provides the best travel opportunities during the summer when the weather is very hot in India, particularly in the central regions of the Buddhist holy land, there are relatively few other visitors to these locations during that time. A benefit of this is that it is easier to photograph, measure, video record, and otherwise document the sites when few other visitors are present. However, an essential dimension of the Buddhist sites—how they are used by Buddhist practitioners—is more difficult to witness and evaluate. Fortunately, during the December-January winter break, the Dalai Lama and other prominent Buddhist masters travel to Bōdhgayā to provide mass teachings over a month-long period, drawing thousands of Buddhist pilgrims to the region from across the world. In addition to Bōdhgayā, many auxiliary sacred sites are visited by pilgrims, and temporary villages of pilgrims emerge across the region. Consequently, it is anticipated that a future partnership with the Department of Anthropology would permit the creation of a special fall course in order to train graduate and undergraduate students in interviewing techniques, recording oral histories, and documenting pilgrimage practices. The first author of the present article, who leads the program in Asia, and a cultural anthropologist would lead groups of student researchers to this region of India during the pilgrimage season in order to capture that critical dimension of the lived experience of the locations.

Such an approach fosters a high level of critical awareness of students' own personal learning networks and their attendant cultural knowledge-making as they work to synthesize a coherent picture out of the field experience, canonical sources in translation, biographical accounts of the Buddha's life, partisan Buddhist histories, pilgrim narratives to the Buddhist holy sites written from an insider perspective, scientific archeological descriptions, and contemporary critical scholarship analyzing earlier depictions of the Buddhist holy land. Students are called upon to assess distinct perspectives on specific holy sites and to situate these perspectives relative to each other. They must evaluate the claims of the faithful in regards to the site selected by their research group, consider the means through which sacred narratives are employed in the creation of sacred space, and contend with the historical veracity of their sources. Each research group— of which there are four or five each year—focuses on a single site and leads the research activities of all the program participants at their own site when the group travels to India and Nepal. In addition, the remaining students serve as research assistants at each of the sites selected by the other research groups. The professor and his assistant model the project each year by researching their own site and demonstrating all of the stages of the research process.

As student researchers assemble the range of available information about their sites, they confront the extent to which their personal learning networks includes them in the larger network of commentators on the significance of the place and space constituted by their site. They enter into the complex, ongoing network of perspectives, historical objects, languages, and physical locations. Furthermore, in presenting their understanding of their locations in India and Nepal through the construction of story maps, annotated photo galleries, and textual explanations, they must consider how various audiences will make use of the project website.

They also learn how to configure the representation of their knowledge in a way that is usable and accessible to these audiences. This is in keeping with Sun (2012), who has argued that design researchers should "localize" research methodologies to specific groups of users and their cultural contexts. For her, localization is a "design philosophy that integrates action and meaning in technology design in order to make a technology usable and meaningful to culturally diverse users" (p. 267). Students attempting to trace cultural impacts, expand their personal learning networks, and represent these configurations for external audiences must consider not only what information to represent, but how these audiences will take action based on this information.

For example, scholars, instructors, and college students engaged in studying Buddhism are most likely to access the website through a desktop computer or laptop with its wide-ranging functionality, large screen, and ability to display multiple windows simultaneously. Those constituencies' key interests in the website reside in the assessment of historical sources, the critical evaluation of the motivations behind religious claims, and the descriptions of the sites, including especially their archeological, architectural, and art historical dimensions. In contrast, pilgrims are more likely to access the site through a mobile device while on the ground in India and Nepal, and their primary concerns will relate to maps, navigation of the physical location, and canonical assertions about the sites. Tourists represent a third category of user with interests that perhaps overlap the other two audiences. Addressing these diverging needs calls for creativity, and the questions of usability and user experience will differ significantly in the different cases.

Below we discuss the context of study abroad and how actual encounters with cultural places and spaces outside of their home cultures affect students engaged in intercultural research, communication, and design.

The impacts of study abroad on student networks

Proponents of the educational value of the study abroad experience, such as Elijah Siegler (2015), understand the merits of inviting students to trace cultural impacts across borders and through the boundaries of their own cultural assumptions. Similarly, scholars who advocate a cross-cultural approach to intercultural research and communication often approach such endeavors by challenging dominant cultural assumptions within interlocutors through communication, collaboration, and knowledge transfer (Matsunaga & Torigoe, 2008; Sun, 2012; and Thatcher, 2006). Frequently, people who do not travel abroad come to assume that their own experience, viewpoints, and belief systems are shared by everyone. All it takes is a relatively brief exposure of several weeks to a dramatically different cultural setting for people to realize that much of the structure and fabric of daily life is optional and that many people in other cultures opt otherwise. A well-designed study abroad program thus aims to impart disciplinary content, to take advantage of the high impact of experiential learning in a foreign environment, and also to teach students broader life lessons that concern diversity, intercultural communication, adaptability, and global awareness. These latter aspects of study abroad programming may not always be specifiable in individual activities, but rather, are emergent benefits that arise in sometimes unexpected contexts as a result of the full impact of the program.

Study abroad involves students entering into a set of challenging and novel networks of connectivity. By encountering networks of people, places, and communication technologies and contexts that are incredibly unfamiliar to them, students must learn to adapt to these new configurations, often by assembling innovative networks of personal learning and cultural transmission. At the same time, there is always the risk that participants in a study abroad program will not deeply engage the local environment, and the program will turn out to be merely a tour, or worse, tourism. The weakest programs tend to be package deals developed by for-profit companies in which the faculty member is little more than a student recruiter, a familiar face, and a chief chaperone (Siegler, 2015, pp. 38-39). Due to the comparatively high cost, such programs tend to be of limited duration and hence minimal impact.

The best study abroad programs are designed, led, and implemented by faculty members who connect their own disciplinary expertise and their deep engagement with the particular foreign environment to the itinerary and the daily activities of the students. The itinerary has a coherence, direction, and purpose that enable students to integrate their experience with the academic content being conveyed. Pre-departure reading assignments, classroom activities, and orientation discussions, experiences on the ground in the foreign country, and faculty-student encounters serve to advance students' realization of specific disciplinary learning outcomes. These exchanges should include formal presentations in which students are informed about the history of individual locations and activities, the meanings of experiences in the itinerary, and the purposes that underlie the structure of the program. It is important to create opportunities for the lingering questions of the day to be addressed in an open-ended format so students can work to integrate their experience, to try out their interpretations, and to share with the other students their emerging understandings, thus expanding their personal learning networks exponentially. Equally important are those impromptu exchanges in which students confide their uncomfortable questions around the dinner table or on the walk back from highly-charged activities, like a visit to cremation grounds.

Study abroad programs that incorporate purposeful research projects enable students to learn how to inhabit a discipline, to ask questions within its domain, to explore what counts as evidence in its terms, to test out means of generating data, to perform field research, to create coherence out of disparate sources of insight, and to depict knowledge derived through the norms of that particular academic enterprise. Fieldwork permits students to enter the culture of the discipline and to make connections between the messy, networked environment in which scholars endeavor to make sense of the lived experience of subjects, on the one hand, and the more orderly and systematic received knowledge that shows up in textbooks in an authoritative and definitive voice, on the other. Students come to understand and struggle with the multiplicity of disparate perspectives as they work to create their own coherent understanding, and the scholarly enterprise of creating coherence parallels and complements the need to synthesize that also arises from highly engaged travel experiences.

Naturally, some disciplines are more suited to field studies than others, and faculty members who create programs will need to discover methods for provoking learning experiences distinctive to their discipline. Students can be provided with opportunities to engage in diverse aspects of the research activities that approximate real scholarly research, even if some parts of the enterprise

cannot be realized. An effective program of study must take account of the opportunities afforded by the environment of the foreign location and provide for challenging but achievable projects.

Within Technical and Professional Communication, for instance, students can engage cultures by developing communication deliverables that represent the cultures they have encountered. As Michael Madson (2014) has argued, TPC "needs greater attention to subjectivities" and "more data grounded in real-life intercultural encounters" (73). One methodology Madson recommends for achieving these goals is "digital ethnography," which Dhiraj Murthy (2011) has defined as "ethnography mediated by digital technologies" (p. 159). By representing local cultures in digital media, students gain insight into not only the connections they are making between their own cultures and the host culture, but also into effective communication practices for rendering these experiences for external audiences. Below we expand on this point through an exploration of the digital components of a project to map the Buddhist holy land.

Tracing cultural impacts through digital media

As we mentioned above, the digital humanities (DH) is a flexible term referring to a set of methodologies through which the critical questions of any humanities discipline are addressed using features available via computer-based technologies, including mapping with geotagged data points, building interactive timelines, and utilizing multimedia (audio, video, photographic, virtual reality imagery, etc.) resources, all knit together with cross-references that link various online networks of people and information. A somewhat more general term, digital scholarship (DS), is employed in an effort to include social science research, as well. This scholarly approach is intrinsically interdisciplinary and frequently employs both humanities and social science methodologies and concerns, and thus mirrors much of the knowledge-making practices of Technical and Professional Communication.

The digital humanities provides a promising and exciting new area for research, and it has wide applicability as an instructional tool. Though today's students display a range of proficiency with digital technologies, as Alice Daer and Liza Potts (2016) have contended, use of such technologies as teaching tools arguably make possible new forms of humanistic research and learning. While the research paper has long served as the default assignment in a wide range of academic disciplines, DH provides new ways of producing, organizing, and depicting knowledge, and a subset of today's students elect to create DH assignments as an alternative to writing papers, when given the choice. They quickly discover that alternative assignments are not an easy way out, but rather that they involve their own substantial challenges that relate to developing an understanding of the affordances and limitations of a specific medium. Despite that, students are frequently excited by these novel approaches to research and scholarly communication.

The two means of composing and communicating knowledge—research papers and DH projects—are strikingly different. A standard research paper can be employed to achieve many aims, but given the conventions of the form—sentences and paragraphs that build in a linear fashion—it is particularly suited to temporally-ordered historical accounts or sequential

arguments. The chronological format of progressing from page to page fosters causal approaches to the consideration of evidence and the depiction of knowledge:

> The narrative carries with it a teleological imperative to explain events as a consequence of past actions or causes and to derive some meaning from the story, lessons that we can use in some way to understand who we are. (Bodenhamer, 2015, p. 17)

While an emphasis on temporal or sequential forms of narration may animate some forms of inquiry, they may constrain other forms of explication. The standard production of evidence through library research may not be achievable in many study abroad contexts, for example, while the collection of multimedia resources can be ideal for such programs.

In contrast, a DH project organizes information in quite a different manner. Instead of the chronological arrangement of a research paper, DH projects can easily integrate both chronological and spatial configurations of knowledge, with timelines and maps being deeply integrated. Spatial narratives, for example, fill digital displays with an orienting map and links to other forms of information that include text, photos, videos, audio, and timelines that shift and come into focus depending on the user's navigation of the site (see Figure 1 and 2 below).

This 2015 satellite image reveals an orderly grid crowded with thousands of structures. Pleiades satellite imagery provided by Airbus Defense and Space.

Figure 1. Satellite image of a Syrian refugee camp from The Uprooted

Refugees reside in 24,000 prefab shelters and are served by schools (green), hospitals and clinics (red), and community spaces (blue). Some 3,000 refugee-owned shops line the camp's busy thoroughfares (purple).

Figure 2. Overlay of refugee structures based on user's scroll through the site

In the above screenshots of a story map, entitled The Uprooted (http://storymaps.esri.com/stories/2016/the-uprooted/), we can see the rhetorical effects of digital network configurations on the way knowledge is made. Rather than explaining a simple chronological account of the Syrian refugee crisis, the makers of The Uprooted created a series of layered configurations that visually depict the impacts of the crisis on the landscape of Syria.

In a similar way, as mentioned above, DH scholarship frequently takes full advantage of the interconnectivity of many different pieces of information, a means of organizing knowledge described by Gochenour as "nodalism," the notion that each item gains its meaning by way of its place in a complex network of associations with other items (p. 1). This fits well with the small, but growing conversation within TPC on cross-cultural design (Sun, 2012, Getto, 2014, Getto & St. Amant, 2014, Sarat-St. Peter, 2015). The crux of this conversation is that designing digital communication and technology across cultures is not only an important new trend in the business world, but a necessary act of intercultural research, inquiry, and practice. As savvy professional communicators work with stakeholders from other cultures to design digital products and services, the realm of intercultural research and practice is broadened, the cultural fluency of all interlocutors is increased, and the field of TPC also receives new opportunities for reaching public audiences.

In a similar way, leveraging data from a multifaceted research project on Buddhist holy sites invites students, scholars, and public audiences to make new connections between previously disparate types of information and cultures (see Figures 3 and 4 below).

Figure 3. Mockup of Mapping Buddhist Holy Land Homepage
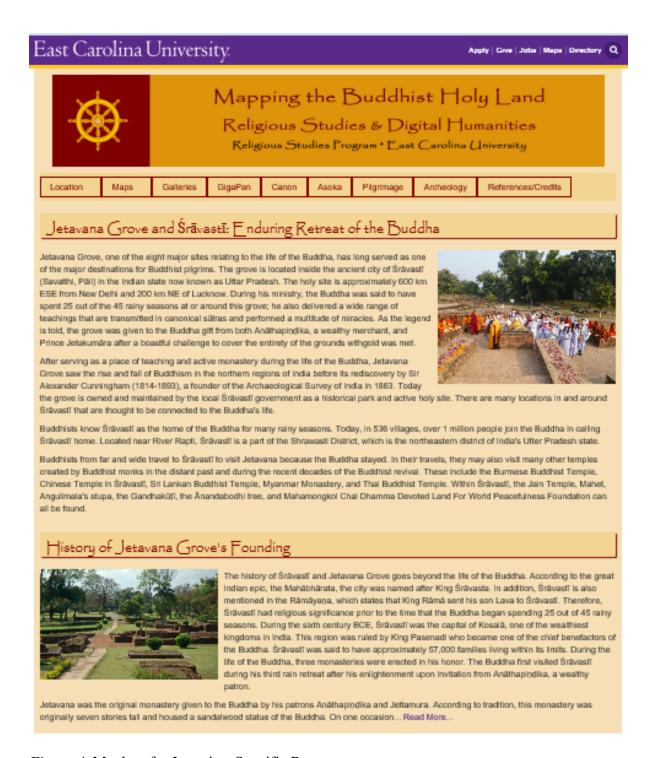
Figure 4. Mockup for Location-Specific Pages

In the above figures, we see a prototype of the digital project that communicates distinct knowledge about these sites, knowledge that is deeply networked. It relies on traditional humanities scholarly conversations on Buddhist holy sites relying upon Buddhist texts, historical

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and archeological analysis, and information emerging from field studies of the sites. Also included are indigenous narratives that pilgrims employ to understand the sites. The overall structure of the website, which at the time of writing is still in development, will seek to make this networked knowledge useful to distinct audiences, such as by utilizing maps viewable on mobile platforms that members of the general public can easily grasp while still providing rich, scholarly descriptions and depictions of the sites.

Digital projects of this complexity also require funding and other forms of support. Internal to the authors' university, institutional funding from the Honors College is facilitating wide-ranging interdisciplinary instruction for the inaugural edition of the project, while an emerging hub for digital scholarship at our institution (Digital Innovation and Scholarship in Social Sciences and Humanities, or DISSH) purchased some equipment to support the project (cameras, video cameras, audio recorders, geospatial data recorders, data storage, etc.). Diverse departments, colleges, and administrative units across campus, recognizing the potential for funded research in this area, are contributing funding, graduate student lines, and other assets to support digital projects, including the one described in this article. Separately, external funding is being sought to hire graduate students in computer science and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to develop the project website and to maximize innovative and effective means of depicting knowledge produced through the project. Separate funding is also being sought to film a documentary on the project itself.

Digital scholarship is intrinsically multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary, and the current project already involves collaborators from across the university and beyond. Technical support from a GIS-related center and from DISSH are helping to prepare the students and will provide some basic research tools. Library staff has been involved in training students on software and consulting on the preparation of metadata for capturing information on media resources. Our institution's IT center has provided extensive support in software and web development. Faculty members from geography and art history have played instructional roles. And an artist and photographer has served as a consultant to the project.

Digital projects provide diverse opportunities for students and faculty members to apply disciplinary research methods to real world situations, and to create communication deliverables that will be useful and usable far beyond the end date of a given project. This is not to mention the professional development opportunities for both students and faculty members who often need to be trained in emerging technologies as part of such projects. Thus, increasing numbers of academic disciplines regard digital scholarship as a necessary part of educating their students in digital literacy. These projects provide a means for including graduate and undergraduate students in the research experience, and students can participate in these opportunities through a wide variety of culminating experiences, including Honors theses, Masters theses, and undergraduate research and creative activities projects. Additionally, digital projects can serve as vehicles of public service as students and scholars use these methods to address regional needs, such as helping non-profit organizations to communicate with their respective constituencies, and through building new networks of relationships and resources for local community members.

The extensively collaborative nature of digital scholarship creates new challenges in the academy, and careful consideration must be devoted to addressing a range of new problems as humanities and social science research is undertaken in new ways and as students and faculty members are called to communicate research through technologies that did not exist even two decades ago. Because of this, below we discuss some limitations and adjustments to consider when engaging in projects that are both intercultural and digital.

Limitations and adjustments required for intercultural digital projects

Intercultural digital scholarship complicates instructional efforts by adding to the learning outcomes of a course, and the current novelty of such educational programs requires smaller formats, closer mentoring, and continual feedback to guide students in their research. It also requires the faculty member to sever the tether of many of the customary features of classroom instruction and student evaluation. Quizzes, exams, and other formal, graded assignments must be dispensed with if students are expected to produce a project of substantial depth and significant quality, while learning new technologies, adjusting to alternative course expectations, and finding a new type of authorial voice for themselves.

For example, while group projects have existed in the academy for a long time, the deeply collaborative nature of digital scholarship invites creative solutions toward inspiring cooperation, distinct means of assigning academic credit for the semester's work, and methods for keeping track of the scholarly credit for the published work. Following a longstanding practice at the University of Virginia, which is a leader in digital scholarship, each formal item that is included in a large collaborative digital project can include metadata identifying the creator of that item in order to make all assets searchable and sortable by author. This structure permits a realistic and objective assessment of the contribution of each student and scholar to the whole. Moreover, the material published online can be subjected to peer review by scholars in related disciplines, allowing faculty members to better account for the work that happens outside of traditional forms of academic scholarship.

While there will be some adjustment for both students and faculty members, there are great benefits to projects that incorporate both intercultural and digital elements. Students become fluent with new technologies, software, and cultural norms, and they learn skills that are transferable to other academic pursuits and their future careers in which communicating through technology and across cultures will only be valued more as time passes. Given current trends in the business world, professional communication of the future will bear a stronger resemblance to a digital humanities projects than to traditional academic research: networked, associational, multimodal, and delivered in a public venue.

Digital communication multiplies the ways in which knowledge can reach a broader audience, especially in the developing world. Some parts of the current project website can be translated into Tibetan, Hindi, Japanese, Chinese, Thai, and other languages so that pilgrims can access maps, canonical accounts of the significance of key locations, historical pilgrims' accounts, and other features likely to be most valuable to these users. Merely translating the words of the photo captions and the legends on the maps may not achieve the purpose of communicating with a non-English speaking Buddhist pilgrim audience, however. It may be useful at a future time to

include collaborators from some of the Buddhist populations most likely to make use of this resource. A multilingual, moderated, and interactive comments section could broaden the utility of the project for pilgrims, while complicating many aspects of the larger project. Such a feature would dramatically enhance the cross-cultural interaction of all participants, but it could open up significant questions of the quality and reliability of content. Tensions could emerge between claims of Buddhist communities and assertions of scholarly voices. As mentioned above, user interfaces on handheld devices will pose particular restrictions for how this part of the project can and should be realized. All of these considerations invite reflection on the uses to which scholarship has been deployed and could be deployed.

Likewise, educational institutions are called to adapt to these new approaches, which blur the lines between research, teaching, and professional communication. Some academic disciplines with a culture of solitary research may have to consider new ways of collaborating in research, co-authoring in scholarly production, and reaching across disciplinary and cultural boundaries. It is exceedingly common in the natural sciences for numerous scientists to make small, focused contributions to a large project overseen by one or two principal investigators. Both undergraduate and graduate students routinely participate in such projects by collecting samples, taking measurements, or tending to lab animals. In the end, the scholarly credit for resulting publications accrues in the main to the PIs and their research colleagues who contributed in the most substantial ways. Such practices are almost unheard of in the humanities, where the translators, literary analysts, philosophers, and scholars of religion toil mostly in isolation. Yet, digital projects invite new forms of large-scale collaborative scholarship that involve data collection by dozens of researchers, and close cooperation between computer scientists, GIS analysts, social scientists, humanists, and many others to create projects on a scale that no individual alone could accomplish.

It has been more than two decades since universities began to grapple with the challenges posed by innovative faculty members seeking to submit digital scholarship for consideration for promotion and tenure. Standards for peer review of such work have been uneven, and senior faculty members sometimes do not understand, endorse, or even acknowledge the academic legitimacy of such research. Nor are they willing to grant consideration for it that would be likely to result in the professional rewards that arise from the traditional models of scholarship. For some institutions just now embracing these new directions in digital scholarship, those challenges for the first generation of DH scholars are still ongoing.

Faculty members engaged in a project of this type will also find distinct challenges to instructional delivery methods. Instead of relying on accepted textbooks materials, they will more often find themselves thinking out loud, exposing students to their own emerging knowledge within a new area, or linking to online readings and other digital projects within their field, some of which shift and move from semester to semester. This approach will favor innovative approaches to instructional delivery, as faculty members test different approaches to research problems and instructional pedagogies, and sometimes discover the need to backtrack and try again. The novelty of these approaches to instruction and research, and their exploratory nature, require flexibility and adaptability. Even in areas of scholarly inquiry that are deeply familiar to a faculty member, the rapid pace with which these technologies change requires an

adventurous spirit and a willingness to remake the scholarly enterprise frequently. New technologies will continually refresh the scholarly enterprise by enabling novel narrative forms, innovative means of depicting knowledge, and creative methods of making insights available to a broad audience of both specialists and the public.

Implications: Communicating beyond the academy and the U.S.

Intercultural digital projects are delivered in a format that is readily accessible to audiences that go beyond the narrow group of disciplinary specialists that are addressed in most academic journals. The challenge of communicating with audiences and stakeholders from foreign cultures that are the subject of research—and to include them in parts of the scholarly conversation they may find useful or interesting for their own purposes—invites scholars to present their knowledge in accessible, culturally-sensitive formats. Doing so can mean making their scholarship and teaching relevant to public concerns in new ways, and rethinking the model of the traditional ivory tower echo chamber in which individual specialists speak exclusively to a narrow group of other specialists, most of whom they know by name.

At the same time, intercultural digital projects hold the potential to span cultural boundaries in new ways. Such scholarship lends itself to intercultural communication by linking previously disparate networks of people, activity, and information. In the project described above, for example, pilgrims and tourists visiting the Buddhist holy land are likely to constitute a special audience for this research, as they could find the project quite useful in planning and navigating through their travels. Longer scholarly articles produced through the project may be of less sustained interest to this public audience, and thus special attention will be required to configure the parts of the project website that will be most useful to pilgrim and tourist users.

Digital scholarship opens new vistas for generating and communicating knowledge. The academy must engage in critical self-reflection to elaborate these new forms of teaching, research, and communication in rigorous ways. Such efforts will be repaid by advancing student preparation and professionalization, creating innovative new means of generating and communicating knowledge, and increasing the relevance of scholarship beyond the academy.

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