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Inclusive Pedagogy through Digital Scholarship

A Case Study

Rebecca Fitzsimmons and Anne Shelley

Introduction

Cultivating a sense of community and building toward an inclusive classroom environment are central goals of teaching and learning, and ones that have been challenged in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. One notable and widespread response from higher education was a shift to primarily online teaching. As faculty found themselves revising how they delivered lessons and developed assignments, a shift to online classroom instruction offered opportunities to rethink what inclusive spaces and active participation looks like in a college classroom and beyond.

In her 2012 chapter “‘This Is Why We Fight’: Defining the Values of Digital Humanities,” Lisa Spiro proposed a list of values that should be central to digital scholarship. That list included openness, collaboration, collegiality and connectedness, diversity, and experimentation.¹ These values also form the underpinnings of a complex and community-oriented classroom landscape that champions active participation and empowers students to become effective curators, communicators, and knowledge producers. In summer 2020, two librarians at Illinois State University taught a faculty development workshop on using digital scholarship tools in the classroom that encouraged faculty in a variety of disciplines to think about reshaping assignments using new methods and with Spiro’s values in mind.

Following this workshop, an instructor invited the librarians to help design a group project that incorporated multimodal publishing, data visualization, and mapping methods into one of her graduate-level courses related to community building in K–12 educational institutions. The tools incorporated into the course allowed a range of collaborative possibilities between students, creating new working and communication spaces that encouraged everyone to freely share ideas and learn from each other. We challenged students to have important conversations about how they could leverage open and accessible tools as a powerful means of outreach outside the higher education classroom. The goal of these conversations was to generate ideas about how common digital scholarship tools and methods could be used to promote equity and inclusivity in communications with school partners, helping to build more participatory and engaged communities and reimagining what inclusivity and deep collaboration can accomplish in classrooms, schools, neighborhoods, and spaces beyond.

Pedagogy and Inclusivity in Digital Scholarship

The transition to online delivery of course material has led many librarians and faculty members in a wide range of disciplines to consider how they can increase a sense of engagement, equity, and inclusion in their virtual classroom spaces. Adding previously unused digital tools or revisiting the possibilities of incorporating digital scholarship methods into the classroom has proved a powerful way for many instructors to reshape interactions in changing classroom environments. Tools used in digital scholarship naturally fit into this landscape because they can support equity and inclusivity in the classroom. Many are free to use, web-based, encourage project sharing, and support collaborative group work. Furthermore, many platforms adapt easily to resource sharing and can be used to cultivate a flexible and safe space for the exploration of ideas and collective learning among peers. Discussions within the digital humanities community that have centered on the core values that drive this work are useful.² In the nearly ten years since Lisa Spiro proposed a list of values that should be central to digital humanities work, asserting that “instead of trying to pigeonhole digital humanities by prescribing particular methods or theoretical approaches, we can instead focus on a community that comes together around values such as openness and collaboration,”³ much has been written about the possibilities for rethinking how digital scholarship across fields and inside classrooms can look.

First, despite the possibilities that openness and collaboration present to create less hierarchical and more flexible communities of practice, we also have to acknowledge some important critiques of the promises and limitations of digital humanities

ideals. These critiques include accessibility issues, conversations around digital exceptionalism, and ethical considerations surrounding the use of student labor for DH projects.⁴ Maha Bali has pointed to widespread and deeply rooted illusions of inclusivity, especially in one-size-fits-all courses, platforms, and online spaces that espouse universal values.⁵ We feel that responding directly to the needs of participants and partners to tailor instruction and project goals, along with resisting the urge to encourage groups to find an immediate consensus while generating ideas, can help to offset some of these challenges to inclusion.

Suggesting there may be a waning openness to fresh perspectives and welcoming new participants to the field, Sean Michael Morris has written about academic work, conformity, and the institutionalization of digital humanities, noting, “it’s also become all too discriminating about what and whom the field may include.”⁶ In addition, it is important to examine the resources used in creating digital projects for potential barriers to inclusivity, including the ways that some voices have been marginalized, excluded, or misrepresented in archival holdings, descriptive processes, and library catalogs. In writing about library technology, Chris Bourg has noted a need for transparency about the limitations of inclusivity and the biases embedded in technology, stating that “digital humanities frequently relies on library expertise and resources, but often in ways that are surprisingly uncritical.”⁷ These issues all certainly call for active and ongoing interrogation—or at least vigilance—of where the possibilities of digital scholarship, pedagogy, and community building might inadvertently eclipse inclusivity.

Another point to consider is the perceived barriers between fields of study and how breaking them down is an important step toward inclusive instruction and research possibilities. In thinking about the applications of a variety of digital tools and research methods, Lisa Spiro has drawn connections between digital humanities and digital social sciences, noting that while there are differences in approaches in the various fields of study, there is also a tremendous amount of methodological overlap, interdisciplinary work, and opportunity for scholars across disciplines to collaborate.⁸ Lauren Klein and Matthew Gold, writing specifically about the expansion of digital humanities to “foreclose the question of ‘who’s in and who’s out’ by allowing the ‘differently structured possibilities’ of the digital humanities to emerge,”⁹ have also hinted at a more universal issue in digital scholarship—namely that the same principles and methods applied in different ways throughout the various humanities fields have relevance to pedagogy in fields outside these disciplines.

These observations can easily apply to digital scholarship in closely related fields such as education (the subject of our course case study), which is often interdisciplinary, highly collaborative, and seeking to leverage digital tools. Further extending the idea of meaningful collaboration across traditional boundaries, Wendy Hsu challenges the models of one-way communication often associated with scholarship when she writes about public humanities through the lens of civic engagement,

noting that, “by evoking lessons on public inclusion, community-driven inquiry, and public-benefit design, I hope that we as humanists can be inspired to contribute to the public while participating as partners with the public.”¹⁰ In particular, Hsu’s assessment of how creating a “community-driven digital object” and using methods for “intervening in a civic or public process in a way that furthers a humanist agenda”¹¹ is extremely relevant to course work that cultivates a sense of community and produces work that can reach beyond the classroom to actively engage a broader public audience.

There are many frameworks and approaches for implementing digital scholarship activities in teaching, and much that is relevant to our course design has been written about the specific methods, information literacy skills, openness of resources, collaborative emphasis, and interactions between faculty and students in the production of digital content. Kristen Mapes builds on Lisa Spiro’s earlier articulation of a set of values that should guide the digital humanities field to outline one such framework for teaching. In her presentation “Teaching Values, Not Definitions,” she identifies components of digital humanities projects and syllabi, with a focus on how openness, diversity, collegiality, and collaborative project work commonly guide digital scholarship in the classroom.¹² In writing about the increasing prevalence of online materials and communications in higher education classrooms, William Thomas and Elizabeth Lorang question the oppressive focus on large-scale projects, commercial resource sets, and closed classroom communities. They note that “to a surprising degree, we have ceded control and critical perspective in response to the promised potential of volume and the large scale”¹³ and that this can come at the expense of smaller, more engaging opportunities for students to create and share knowledge. In detailing the methods employed in their ongoing History Harvest project,¹⁴ the authors share a framework for replicating this model, with the assertion that “we must insist on and enact more reciprocal, open, and community-based terms of digital engagement in higher education.”¹⁵ The K–12 community-building focus of our case study encourages this outward-looking approach that seeks to create an inclusive communication model, rather than a one-way, product-driven outcome.

Similarly focused on authentic learning experiences for students, David “Jack” Norton notes that “DH courses locate knowledge in a student-centered process” and that “they must take knowledge, interrogate it, change it, remix it, and present it.”¹⁶ This set of methods for engagement builds on ideas outlined by Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson, who defined “metaliteracy” by noting that it “expands the scope of traditional information skills ...to include the collaborative production and sharing of information in participatory digital environments,” which “promotes empowerment through the collaborative production and sharing of information.”¹⁷ When truly supported, information sharing among peers increases equity because it draws on the strengths of multiple contributors and encourages different perspectives to be included in discussions and project deliverables. This practice is built into

the school-community focus of our project, with the intention that this practice will extend to ongoing projects that students implement in their own school environments. Common to all the methods covered in this section is a focus on making digital scholarship in the classroom flexible, collaborative, and inclusive, which is the most significant element of our case study that will be explored in detail.

Digital Scholarship Background at Illinois State University

In March 2019, the library convened a Digital Humanities Task Force to investigate the campus's current activities and interest in digital scholarship to determine the types and levels of library support needed. The task force used internal and external environmental scans, a faculty survey, and a focus group to produce a white paper describing findings from its investigations and recommendations for better supporting digital scholarship at Illinois State University.

We learned that faculty are teaching using a variety of digital methods, including but not limited to data visualization, mapping, and virtual reality. In addition to identifying existing campus resources to support digital scholarship work, the task force identified needs, such as the ability to collaborate across disciplines, find project partners, or procure a specific type of support or expertise. They do not feel there is currently a place or mechanism on campus for them to do so.

Milner Library has been able to address some of these needs by offering new digital-scholarship-related programming and professional development opportunities. One example is enhancing the library's partnership with our campus's Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT) to offer faculty workshops that focus on using digital scholarship tools, methods, and values in teaching.

COVID/Shift to Online Teaching

In mid-March 2020, ISU abruptly shifted all classes from in-person to virtual, and CTLT rapidly expanded support for instructors' transition to online teaching. We saw an opportunity to offer faculty more information about digital scholarship tools and methods that might fit well with online learning and support group projects in a virtual environment. Further, because all students in the class have a chance to be

creators and contribute intellectually toward a shared project—rather than the bulk of the knowledge being imparted by the instructor—digital scholarship projects naturally allow for an inclusive and equitable environment of sharing expertise. We offered a workshop on using digital scholarship tools and methods in the classroom as part of CTLT’s 2020 Summer Institute. A workshop participant then asked us to collaborate on a project to incorporate mapping, multimodal publishing, and data visualization methods into her fall 2020 course.

Working with Educational Administration and Foundations 587—Community Relations Seminar

Instructor Goals

Educational Administration and Foundations 587—Community Relations Seminar is part of a Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) program that “is framed around questions of equity, ethics, and social justice to bring about solutions to complex problems of practice.”¹⁸ Most students enrolled in the course were current educational administrators. Both sections were taught online, with students in one section local to Bloomington–Normal and students in the other section from the Chicago area. The instructor wanted students to create an online group project related to school-community engagement that included a community engagement audit, plan for long-term increases in community partnership, and an interactive community asset map.

Librarian Roles

The collaboration on the course began with a basic workshop on using digital scholarship tools in the classroom to promote exploration, creative research directions, and collaboration. The course instructor reached out to inquire if we thought Scalar—a multimedia digital authoring tool—could work for a major project that would include two sections of the seminar and nine groups who needed to share information in highly collaborative ways. After some discussion of the goals and expected outcomes, we agreed to co-teach two sessions per section, covering uses of Scalar and Tableau Public. As the sessions took shape, we adjusted the contents to

meet the needs of students, including working on creating and embedding Google maps, using Canva to create multimedia graphics, and using Datawrapper as an easier alternative to Tableau.

We taught initial two-hour sessions on using Scalar and Tableau early in the semester, followed near the end of the semester by another two-hour workshop on creating and embedding a multilayered Google map. Throughout the semester we provided support to students that included individual and group meetings. These sessions ranged in length depending on specific student needs and included troubleshooting technical issues in real time, conversations about how to enhance the communication of ideas, and discussion about uses of Scalar as a community-building tool outside the classroom.

Instruction Methods

We offered a diverse array of instructional strategies to support students in the teaching style that would best meet their needs, including direct demonstration, written directions, video tutorials, and in-person working sessions with individuals and groups. Through these instructional strategies, all of the students enrolled in the course were able to successfully work in groups using Scalar to complete a finished chapter section of a class book that included all the required elements of a community assessment and action plan.

The learning outcomes of the sessions were tied to several sections of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, which reinforced valuable skills related to digital scholarship. The learning objectives for the project extended beyond acquiring technological skills and included work that particularly reinforced the frames “Information Has Value” and “Scholarship as Conversation.”¹⁹ Students not only located data and information about the schools and surrounding communities that formed the basis for their projects, but also considered ways that they could use a range of digital tools to communicate that information. Since the focus of the class (and the Scalar project) was on developing ways to enhance educational initiatives by creating a sense of true community engagement and involvement in local schools, the students considered ways to leverage digital tools to increase active participation. The students are current K–12 teachers and administrators, so the potential for these digital methods to enhance equity and inclusivity in the classroom extends beyond the course. The interactive aspects and two-way communication features embedded in their digital projects can be a first step in using these tools to begin building and nurturing local communities to support educational practices. This goal of partnering with the public around digital objects such as asset maps and other information objects, while offering ways to actively solicit input and engage in creating civic dialogues and

defining creative interactions within the local school community, embodies Wendy Hsu's ideals of "community-driven inquiry and public-benefit."²⁰

Implications for Equity and Inclusion

It was important to us to recommend options to the students that are free and web-based rather than costly proprietary software. While there are potential access issues related to free, web-based platforms for some users, they are still more equitable choices for most people. We wanted anyone with an internet connection to have equal access to the platforms and the same opportunities to fully engage with the resources. This strategy has potential to benefit users beyond the classroom. As administrators and educators themselves, the students we worked with can also recommend these tools to teachers in their schools to use with their students.

After ensuring that students had equal access to the online platforms they would use for this assignment, our next priority was addressing the spectrum of student confidence in using the tools. Students across both sections had different comfort levels and prior experience with web-based publishing, and we sought to even out these circumstances by making ourselves freely available to help students feel as comfortable as possible using the tools.

Digital scholarship projects are inherently collaborative, and we brought this focus to our instructional approach. Often each person in a project group has a unique role or specialized knowledge they bring to the project. This arrangement promotes inclusivity as everyone's efforts are necessary to the project's success. We encouraged students to freely share knowledge and ideas within their groups, but also to look at the contributions other groups were making to a shared Scalar resource. The ability to look at the work of classmates, examining different ideas and ways of communicating information, is a benefit when trying to support a robust learning community. The ability to examine the technical aspects of other students' work is also invaluable. While our focus is not always tied to a specific platform, the use of Scalar for this group was strategic because it can support inclusive practices beyond the people enrolled in or teaching a particular class; for example, the social annotation tool *hypothes.is* can be enabled, allowing members of the public to engage with Scalar sites by commenting on or questioning what they read there. The shared space allows equitable collaboration within, but also across group projects and creates opportunities to share knowledge and skills both synchronously and asynchronously, actively and indirectly. Our work with this class succeeded in incorporating all of Spiro's defined values while effectively supporting a model of community engagement that should extend beyond the classroom. We will continue to be mindful of building on such important guiding principles in our teaching and future project collaborations with faculty and students.

Conclusion

COVID-19 has presented and will continue to present numerous and varied challenges to higher education. Many institutions' responses to the virus revealed or magnified inequities among students, faculty, and staff, including but not limited to lack of technology needed for online learning, access to spaces conducive to study, differences in job requirements and ability to work remotely, and availability of library resources. Depending on one's circumstances, however, reactions to COVID have also offered opportunities for experimentation and growth. In this case study we have described how we librarians, the course instructor, and the students experimented with new tools and methods that supported inclusive online group work. We see the potential going forward to have important conversations about how we can continue to help expand equity and inclusion across campus through supporting digital scholarship in and out of the classroom. From our perspective we were pedagogically and technologically stretched—but largely not strained. More importantly, this valuable experience continues to inform how we speak with faculty and students about teaching, learning, and community building around digital scholarship.

Notes

1. Lisa Spiro, "'This Is Why We Fight': Defining the Values of Digital Humanities," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matthew K. Gold (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 16–35, <https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled-88c11800-9446-469b-a3be-3fdb36bfbd1e/section/9e014167-c688-43ab-8b12-0f6746095335#ch03>.
2. This chapter references digital humanities as well as digital scholarship. While definitions for both terms vary, *digital scholarship* is—at the time of this writing—generally recognized as an umbrella term that includes digital humanities. In particular, the literature review includes a number of references to digital humanities, as groundbreaking projects that used digital methods were largely driven by humanities researchers, and seminal analyses of these projects and their goals and ideals maintained a similar disciplinary focus.
3. Spiro, "This Is Why We Fight," 16.
4. On accessibility issues, see George H. Williams, "Disability, Universal Design, and the Digital Humanities," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matthew K. Gold (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 202–12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttv8hq.15>. On digital exceptionalism, see Michelle Moravec, "Exceptionalism in Digital Humanities: Community, Collaboration, and Consensus," in *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, ed. Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2018), 169, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv19cwdqv.15>, for a discussion of how "digital exceptionalism is suffused with techno-optimism around what the digital can do and with the belief that the digital represents a marked, and presumably better, break with all that came before," including a discussion of ways that conversations in digital humanities communities may actually eclipse inclusion through an overly optimistic framing of the collaborative potential of the field. Also see Diane Jakacki, "Is There Such a Thing as Digital Exceptionalism ...?" *Diane K. Jakacki—“Tam Arte Quam Marte”* (blog), October 6, 2013, <http://dianekakacki.net/is-there-such-a-thing-as-digital-exceptionalism/> (site

- discontinued) for an early discussion raising the question of what digital exceptionalism might mean, the pitfalls of the term *exceptionalism*, and the potential of embracing digital scholarship methods while treading carefully with the notion that they are better simply because they are digital. On student labor, see Spencer D. C. Keralis, “Disrupting Labor in Digital Humanities; or, The Classroom Is Not Your Crowd,” in *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, ed. Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2018), 273–94, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv19cwdqv.20>.
5. Maha Bali, “The ‘Unbearable’ Exclusion of the Digital,” in *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, ed. Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2018), 295–320, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv19cwdqv.21>.
 6. Sean Michael Morris, “Digital Humanities and the Erosion of Inquiry,” in *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, ed. Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2018), 221, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv19cwdqv.16>.
 7. Chris Bourq, “The Library Is Never Neutral,” in *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, ed. Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2018), 468, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv19cwdqv.29>.
 8. Lisa Spiro, “Defining Digital Social Sciences,” *dh+lib*, April 9, 2014, <https://acrl.ala.org/dh/2014/04/09/defining-digital-social-sciences/>.
 9. Lauren F. Klein and Matthew K. Gold, “Digital Humanities: The Expanded Field,” in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), x, <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt1cn6thb.3>.
 10. Wendy F. Hsu, “Lessons on Public Humanities from the Civic Sphere,” in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 280, <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt1cn6thb.27>.
 11. Hsu, “Lessons on Public Humanities,” 284.
 12. Kristen Mapes, “Teaching Values, Not Definitions: Experiences and Research in the Introductory Digital Humanities Course” (presentation, Digital Humanities and the Undergraduate Experience Conference, Edwardsville, IL, April 26, 2019), <http://www.kristenmapes.com/siue2019/>.
 13. William Thomas and Elizabeth Lorang, “The Other End of the Scale: Rethinking the Digital Experience in Higher Education,” *EDUCAUSE Review* 49, no. 5 (2014): 44, <https://er.educause.edu/-/media/files/article-downloads/erm1452.pdf>.
 14. William G. Thomas, Patrick D. Jones, and Andrew Witmer, “History Harvests: What Happens When Students Collect and Digitize the People’s History?” *Perspectives on History*, January 1, 2013, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2013/history-harvests> offers a good overview of History Harvests and the methods for developing one.
 15. Thomas and Lorang, “Other End of the Scale,” 44.
 16. David “Jack” Norton, “Making Time: Workflow and Learning Outcomes in DH Assignments,” in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), <https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/untitled-f2acf72c-a469-49d8-be35-67f9ac1e3a60/section/flb1d9a6-974b-46c4-afde-7606bf238fc3#ch25>.
 17. Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson, *Metaliteracy* (Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2014); see also Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson, “Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy,” *College and Research Libraries* 72, no. 1 (2011): 64.
 18. Illinois State University, “Doctoral Degree in Education Administration and Foundations: P–12 Administration,” accessed June 4, 2021, https://education.illinoisstate.edu/edd_p12/.
 19. Association of College and Research Libraries, *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016), <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>. The frame Information Has Value is described in this way: “Infor-

mation possesses several dimensions of value, including as a commodity, as a means of education, as a means to influence, and as a means of negotiating and understanding the world. Legal and socioeconomic interests influence information production and dissemination.” The frame Scholarship as Conversation is described in this way: “Communities of scholars, researchers, or professionals engage in sustained discourse with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of varied perspectives and interpretations.”

20. Hsu, “Lessons on Public Humanities,” 284.

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