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**CHANGING METHODS, CHANGING LIBRARIES:**
Making Digital Literacy Accessible for Undergraduate Researchers

Andrew W. Mellon Scholars Foundation & The Hope College English Department

Taylor Rebhan

**ABSTRACT**

Rooted in research accomplished in the summer of 2013 with a fellowship from the Andrew W. Mellon Scholars Foundation, this project focuses on the rapidly changing landscapes of scholarship and storytelling in the Humanities. These changes have come about as myriad of digital tools are now available to undergraduate scholars. From showcasing to researching, students now have unprecedented access to and support for these tools. I show through personal experience as an undergraduate Digital Humanities researcher that as these supplements are honed and further developed, they allow student scholars to ask new questions in their research, answer them accordingly, and display their original work in a refreshing and wide-reaching manner. However, these advances in digital methods also raise concerns for sustainability and integration with traditional research. Hope College’s Van Wylen Library is an example of an institution that strives to be on the leading edge of the digital humanities and is seeking to address these concerns. Knowing the importance of the backbone of a thriving digital liberal arts community, it has taken steps to create new conversations between communities and individuals. I propose several ways in which Van Wylen has accomplished this, as well as several ways that they can in the future. As digital librarianship shows, though technological advances tools are shifting the way scholars think about research, storytelling is still the heart of scholarship.

**WHAT IS THIS PROJECT?**

Through a collaborative push to create outlets for showcasing student scholarship, we initiated and carried out a redesign of the Special Collections at Hope College’s website. The Rare Books, Joint Archives, Digital Constructions, and Image Collections pages have been rewritten and reorganized to better display the archival material and primary sources that are available. To further encourage students to tackle research topics using the Special Collections, we created an accompanying showcase page.

The student scholarship page displays both course projects and student projects. Course projects are assignments given to an entire class that utilize the Special Collections, while student projects are undertaken by individual students and their faculty advisors that ask resources from the collections. By showcasing these projects, the Special Collections website inspires both students and faculty seeking to create their own, distinctive scholarship. It also serves as a platform for students to disseminate their work through the college website. By linking to these select projects, a standard of excellence in collaboration and creative scholarship is formed.

**WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

The intention of the digital project has been twofold. First, it serves as a way for Van Wylen Library to better communicate the richness of the Special Collections at Hope College. By redesigning the pages and adding new features, the site makes these collections more appealing and accessible to students. With clearer and more concise layout, the pages bring the collections to life. Faculty can then encourage their students to see and envisioning them to find that collection that engages their interest. Student projects are shown as examples of the kind of cutting-edge research and scholarship that can be created in synthesis with the primary sources in the collections.

Secondly, the goal of this digital project is to reveal how the library and students can collaborate, both creatively and practically. The redesign of the Special Collections page is just one of many steps that even a small library like Van Wylen can take to further the digital literacy of their students – giving them the ability to find and create original scholarship, as well collaborate, present, and sustain it through digital tools and resources.

**HOW CAN I USE IT?**

As part of my senior Mellon Scholars project, the Digital and Multimedia Tools page has been my focus. My goal for this resource is to give back to the library and student community that it came from. By making an updateable, well-organized, researched list of digital tools and resources for current and future student researchers, I was able to make my scholarship lift weight in a scholarly and creative way.

There are links for project ideas and supplements to papers, tools to aid in writing and researching, methods for digital presentations, and a wide array of online dissertation resources. By integrating these tools with the digital literacy: equipping students with the tools they need to become proficient digital liberal arts majors.

**“Digital humanities can enable researchers and students to test out and compare the implications of different models of thinking. They can pick up the gaps and the silences as well as the ‘certainties,’ and experiment with the challenges of ‘what if’?”**

- Elton Barker

**WHAT WE LEARNED**

The Special Collections are just a small selection of the vast array of library resources offered by Hope College. However, these collections hold the potential for digital renovation. It is our hope that this project will begin many more conversations within teaching and anchoring student scholarship, particularly research that uses digital tools and display methods. Because research within the Special Collections is often suited for integration with digital tools, the projects that are linked to on the showcase page are perfect examples of cutting edge digital scholarship.

**LOOKING FORWARD**

The following are three suggestions for continuing to develop an active digital humanities community within the context of undergraduate research and librarianship.

1. **Create a support system and community within the library specifically dedicated to showcasing work.** This would be a direct application of a resource such as the Digital and Multimedia Tools page. With a network of feedback and guidance, student that utilize these tools would have the help necessary to ensure that they successfully complete their scholarly work.

2. **Broaden the scope of the student showcase, allowing for a cross-disciplinary, college-wide resource.** By standardizing the processes and committing an online gallery of student scholarly work, questions of copyright and project duration would be effectively answered for students and faculty who would have a guaranteed outlet and audience, allowing their high-caliber work to actively engage in conversation even after the semester ends.

3. **Offer digital literacy workshops for faculty and students.** By integrating a creative digital education with traditional scholarly training, new and exciting questions can be asked, answered, and broadcast to the world.

**THANKS**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**