Introducing NYU to Digital Scholarship:
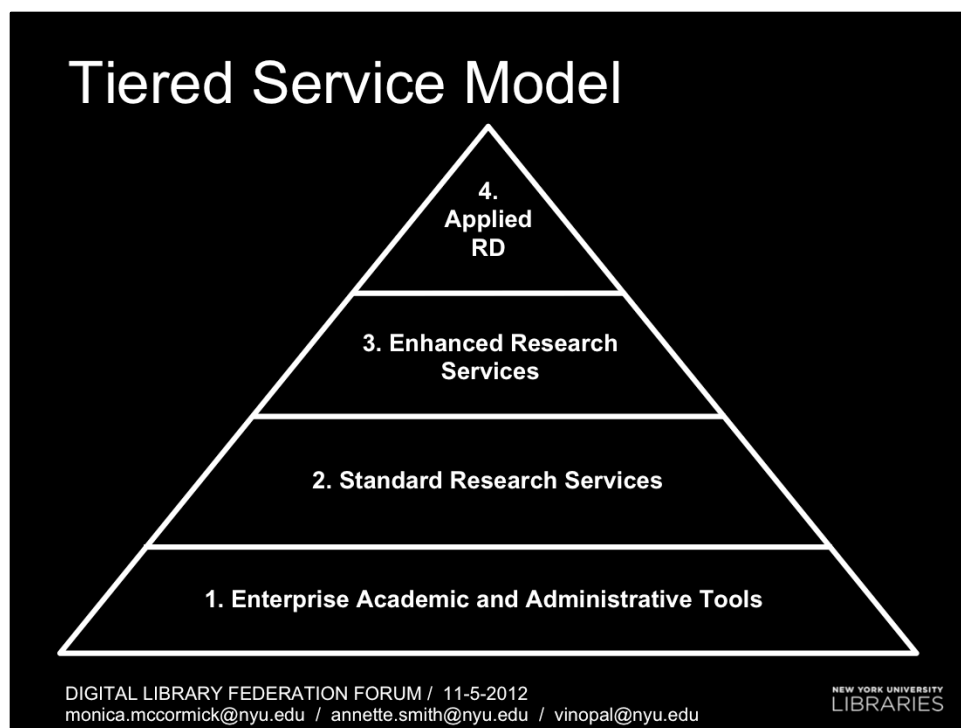
A FACULTY-LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP

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NYU Libraries and ITS have been working since the 1990s to provide digital services and tools. In recent years we've established effective service for enterprise-level services, but are still working on how to provide effective support for more specialized digital scholarship.

Last year at DLF we presented our work that resulted in a tiered service model to address these needs in a way that we hope will be both scalable and sustainable. This pyramid shows the conceptual service model that we developed. Starting at the bottom:

1. Enterprise level services for all: learning management system, institutional repository, tools for collaboration (wikis, basic blog service, Google apps), a range of offerings in our Digital Studio and Data Services.
2. Standard research services using tools that can be supported at scale with minimal customization – e.g. journal publishing platform with a set of different skins, a CMS with a limited number of plug-ins, etc
3. Enhanced research services, for more limited number of users, are services that allow greater customization for special functionality like metadata and search;
4. Top level is R&D to develop tools that can ideally be rolled out as services at lower levels.

This model is an abstraction. Our presentation today will describe our challenges in putting the model into practice, helping us refine the service model in real life.

Challenges

Sustaining legacy work

Individual faculty needs

Rising institutional expectations

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We developed the service model trying to keep in mind the overall goal of creating services that would be scalable and sustainable. That goal continues to be a challenge, for reasons that are likely familiar to many of you.

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We built a number of digital collections in the past that now need maintenance or conversion to new solutions; we have managed that for a few projects, but do not have enough staff to attend to those needs.

Challenges

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Rising institutional expectations

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We have ever more individual faculty members and students who want "a website," which might be a digital collection, an online space to manage or collaborate on research materials, a database with a web front end, a public site with specific needs for search, metadata, display, etc. Some can be helped with existing tools like wikis or Google sites, but many cannot.

Both of these first two have been "known problems" for a number of years.

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A more recently emerging challenge, though, is how to respond to fast-rising Institutional expectations that the Libraries will be central providers of digital scholarship services.

 Here are a few examples:

Departments (e.g., Media, Culture, Comm), Centers (e.g., Irish Studies), and even the Dean of the Grad School of Arts & Sciences (one of our biggest divisions) have all approached the Libraries asking for help to provide training, develop curricula, and perhaps a certificate in Digital Humanities or other digital scholarship areas.

The Humanities Initiative – a cross-institutional body that funds and otherwise enables collaborative research across NYU's many schools – has a new Associate Director who is keen to educate NYU about DH and support new research programs in the field.

NYU is in the process of doing a self-study for our institutional accreditation and has focused on Digital Humanities as a key area to assess.

All of these have led to conversations and some early-stage organizational work to better understand how to meet these needs.

Today we'll describe one particular partnership, with the graduate department of English.

The English department, with some funds from a donor, is developing a Digital Commons, to give faculty and grad students experience in working with technology.

As part of that venture, they have asked us to work with them on two related projects this year:
. Consultations for those chosen for small grants, so we can help them plan and implement their research projects, and direct them to existing services.
. A series of workshops to train students and faculty in a set of digital tools.

Partnership: framing questions

Level of training need

Who can provide it?

Library engagement with research

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The workshops are what we'll talk about today. As we've designed and begun to offer them (4 of 6 completed so far) here are the questions that have framed our work so far:

1. What level of training is needed? – In our initial planning with the department, we discussed workshops with a focus on some DH theory along with training in particular digital research tools; We've ended up doing very basic introductory training, as they realized they needed to start with demystifying the process of using technology for scholarship.

2. Who can best provide training? We have existing services and support teams that meet some needs, but we're uncovering a new set of expectations (for example, text mining). What kinds of new services (and perhaps new or re-skilled staff) might we need? How can we

3. Finally, we recognize a tension between two issues: on the one hand, the faculty and deans' hope that we can provide training or support for a particular set of tools and skills, to prepare their students to be "digital scholars" on some level with, on the other hand, the understanding that digital scholarship should be driven by research questions and methods that our current staff is not in a position to provide.

We have been holding these questions in mind as we designed and are offering the workshops.

Workshops

1. From CV to Website
2. From Video to Streaming Media
3. From Writing to Blogging
4. From Bibliography to Online Research Management
5. From Reading to Text Mining
6. From Evidence to Web Mapping

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We held a series of 6 workshops based upon the request for a more tools-based approach to the series. As you can see from the titles of the workshops – they are introductory in nature and focus on taking the participants from analog to digital. We focused on several tools and themes, including: Google Sites, WordPress, video editing, Zotero, Text Mining and mapping tools.

The participants were a pretty equal number of graduate students and faculty, with the largest chunk coming from the English department, although the remaining participants came from a wide mixture of departments.

We had observers to give us unbiased feedback and helpers to assist the participants. This feedback allowed us to make adjustments for the subsequent workshops. For example, after the first workshop, we realized that the skill level of the participants was so varied that we did not have enough helpers, adding more allowed them to get more out of the sessions. Not knowing the skill levels ahead of time, we were too ambitious in the amount of material we tried to present and were able to offer more targeted sessions in the future. Lastly, we were alerted to issues the participants were having with the room itself as it was the first time we used it for training.

Feedback

"I had never used iMovie before and now feel comfortable playing with it and learning more. I also didn't realize how simple it is to do low-impact video recording (i.e., with an iPhone or personal camera) and edit/publish a presentable video clip for online use."

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We surveyed the groups after each session. The first session was a mixture of comments between people that thought it was too simplistic and those that thought it was too complicated. There were questions about why they should be using the tools and requested theory behind it.

The reviews were largely positive – participants asked for more workshops, more advanced workshops, and were concerned about the participants that needed extra help and slowed the class down.

We had one comment that I felt really captured what we were trying to accomplish – make them feel comfortable enough with the tools that they can explore on their own and make them realize that these tools are accessible and not as complicated to use as they might think.

Challenges

Different skill levels

Unsupported services

Nuts and bolts

Theory and practice

Future workshops

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We faced several challenges with the workshops:
- Different skill levels of the participants
- What are the pros and cons of providing training for tools we don't officially support but that participants are asking for? (WordPress, Zotero)
- Nuts and bolts of the content, are we teaching the right material at the right pace?
- Theory and practice – what we're doing is tools training, we are not training people in research methodology. If people are using this for their scholarship, then maybe the theory needs to be integrated into the workshops
- Future workshops - There is a need for these workshops, but is this the role of the library? How can we support this in an ongoing way that is sustainable and scalable?

As we reflect upon our own experiences with the workshops and think about the future, we also examined what other institutions are doing.

What are others doing?

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We wanted to see what others are doing in this "Introduction to Digital Scholarship" space. We looked at libraries as well as academic departments and programs and focused on Digital Humanities instruction.

What are others doing?

Academic Courses of Study

Library Classes and Talks

Library Innovation

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To generalize, there are three models for instruction related to digital scholarship:

1. Academic courses of study
2. Library classes and talks
3. Library innovation in this space

What are others doing?

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Study

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Academic courses of study:

1. These are for-credit courses, certificates, or Master's programs taught in academic departments.

2. The ones we looked at all emphasize that students will learn both theory and practice. They're interested in digital humanities as a phenomenon -- as an object of study, not just as a practice.

3. Frequently they have labs, so they have a science-type model, where people discuss in class (background and theory) then get hands-on practice and skills with specific tools. (In some cases, labs may occur within the library or draw on other services at the institution)

4. Students do projects not final papers. Most of them are collaborative projects, so they're learning collaboration and project management skills as an intrinsic part of DH practice.

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On the other hand, library classes and talks:

- tend to be practical sessions or one-off training events rather than sustained inquiry into the theory & practice of digital humanities

- There may also be sponsored talks, but these also tend to occur on a one-off basis or are organized for special events (e.g., events around open access week)

- Even if library classes are potentially relevant to digital humanities practice, they are typically aimed at a much broader clientele than just "digital humanists"

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Library Innovation within this space – libraries mixing theory and practice, technical skills with the methodology of digital humanities:

• UVa Praxis Program: offer graduate student fellowships to cultivate the next generation of digital humanities scholars

• Libraries sponsoring ThatCamps

• Libraries working in partnership with other programs to push beyond traditional library instruction:
   • DHSI (University of Victoria, UVic Library, and about a dozen other universities and organizations)
   • Digital Humanities Winter Institute (MITH, University Libraries, CUNY, ADHO, etc.)

As opposed to the more traditional library classes, **these** kinds of activities engage librarians and staff as practitioners of methodology rather than just trainers in a set of discrete skills.

Remaining Questions

Are our planning partners getting what they want?

How do we assess?

What is the library's role?

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Our our partners getting what they want for their faculty and students?
Many attendees not from our partnering department – individuals can be surveyed
but it's harder to evaluate the success of the series as a whole
Will those who attended be prepared to practice digital scholarship?
We aim to prepare them to become part of the digital scholarship conversation, but
how/where will they get the skills to do more complex work?

Assessment: we can look at our survey results, do after-action review with the faculty who helped us frame the series, estimate time spent on the project.

But as we figure out what we learned, what should we report out to our stakeholders? What data will be helpful for evaluating whether a new service would scale up and be sustainable?

We don't have an established reporting structure to capture, analyze, and evaluate such experiments. We want to provide feedback that will help our organization decide whether and how to build a whole new service area.

And finally, we are still pondering how best to determine the library's role – are we service providers, trainers, partners in curriculum building, partners in research? All of those questions are going to remain alive as we go forward.

We look forward to hearing how many of you are approaching these challenges.

Thank You

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