



## Digital Humanities 2016

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### Quality Matters: Diversity and the Digital Humanities in 2016

Digital humanities has been positioned as an amorphous and fluid concept (Kirschenbaum, 2014), particularized in various disciplines, national contexts and even local environments (Galina Russell, 2014; Fiormonte, 2015; Earhart, 2015; Risam, 2017). Yet intact structures that include the annual digital humanities conference, the various global organizations that form ADHO, and journals published by the various societies represent the field as a coherent body of practice. Ruptures at recent conferences reveal the deceptive constructedness of a coherent digital humanities. What we find, instead, is that digital humanities is deeply divisive and fragmented. Such ruptures were apparent at the 2013 Nebraska conference where the 2014 conference organizers announced an all male keynote lineup; <sup>1</sup> the 2013 conference where the awards committee admitted publicly that they made an error in the graduate student awards selection and had not considered gender, resulting in a skewed awards field; <sup>2</sup> the 2015 conference where the conference program featured an announcement of the all male board of the *Frontiers in Digital Humanities* journal; or the 2015 conference where the opening set of seven speakers were all male. <sup>3</sup> In light of this recurring theme, our panel examines how digital humanities, as represented by the yearly international conference, is a digital humanities that elides the borders of practice, that masks areas of dissension, and normalizes the field to a particular homogeneous form without contour.

This idea is supported by the conference programs themselves. Scott Weingart's analysis of DH2015 makes clear that "The DH conference systematically underrepresents women and people from parts of the world that are not Europe or North America" (2015). Gender representation in the digital humanities conference is a galling problem. As Weingart's analysis shows, 46% of attendees to DH 2015 were women, but only 34.6% of authors were women (2015). Weingart further notes the data collection challenges of applying quantitative analysis to race, ethnicity, or other categories of identity. Ultimately, though, whether gender, topic, language, nationality or a combination of both, the DH conference has a problem in that the public structure of digital humanities does not represent the depth of work occurring within the field nor its practitioners. The problem is compounded by the treatment of such ruptures as aberrations, temporary mistakes by individuals rather than structural to the makeup of the conference. Furthermore, the organization siloes "diversity" as a committee matter or special interest (GO::DH, MLMC, diversity committee within PC, etc.), rather than a central concern or the universal interest of an organization with global ambitions, an organization whose goals "are to promote and support digital research and teaching across arts and humanities disciplines, drawing together humanists engaged in digital and computer-assisted research, teaching, creation, dissemination, and beyond, in all areas reflected by its diverse membership" (ADHO, 2015). In part this is caused by our insistence on understanding digital humanities as a big tent or a monolithic entity or field, ignoring the ways that digital humanities is practiced in its localized and cultural environment. Whether it is the way that gender, race and ethnicity, and nation are addressed (or not), how funding works in varying countries, the permanence or impermanence of jobs, and other such structural differences, participation in the international DH conference suggests that digital humanities is, in many ways, a living term, ever evolving, ever shifting in response to particular pressures of scholarship, the academy, national and political contexts, and the individual.

A great deal of social science and psychological research has revealed that such struggles are increasingly a problem for organizational groups such as scholarly societies, and that there are productive strategies for engaging diversity questions (Fredette 2015, Plaut 2010). Further, research suggests that a "colorblind" or gender blind response to organizational structures place great strain on the organization and that ignoring issues of difference negative impacts both group

dynamics and quality (Apfelbaum, 2012; Dezso and Ross, 2012; Ely, 2001; Nishii, 2013). We will be discussing such findings in relationship to positive, process oriented approaches within the digital humanities conference structure.

Our panel consists of an international group of digital humanities scholars who are

invested in a broad understanding of difference and digital humanities. The panel will discuss

current tensions within the field and strategies for negotiating the structural challenges to the DH conference and ADHO itself. Of particular concern will be an examination of how the digital humanities conference understands its relationship to the quality of an international scholarship that is inclusive of a broad range of research topics. Panelists will consider topics that include the challenges of negotiating a wide linguistic field, the affordances and limits of quantitative approaches to diversification, practical positive actions that can be taken as part of the work of the program committee, and other pertinent topics. In doing so, they propose an asset - not deficit- model for developing diverse programs that more accurately represent the heterogeneity of digital humanities.

Organization:

The panel will open with a 5 minute statement by Amy Earhart, the chair, situating our comments within the above stated context.

Each speaker will provide a ten minute statement that will address:

- Barbara Bordalejo, intersectional feminism, the challenges of the majority language and the cultural norm;
- Isabel Galina, peer review, language and perceived quality;
- Alex Gil, translation/multilingualism in the service of trans-cultural equity;
- Lorna Hughes, 'the extra academic professions': the shifting communities of practice in digital humanities, and understanding and recognizing collaboration;
- Roopika Risam, the challenges of quantifying diversity; and
- Melissa Terras, the challenges of managing gender issues in the work of the Program Committee.

After the opening statements, the panel will engage in a discussion with those in attendance. We imagine that our community has much to say about such issues and would like the panel to be a place in which to begin this discussion.

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#### Notes

1.

Sukanta Chaudhuri was invited to keynote the conference, the first keynote speaker from the Indian subcontinent, and an important addition to what would have been all Global North male keynotes. At the same time, the lack of a woman keynote speaker suggests the difficulty in balancing a broad set of diversity issues.

2.

The 2013 awards committee publicly admitted their mistake and corrected the error, a highly commendable action. However, the structural issue remains. We must consider how to develop policies and procedures to avoid replicating such oversights.

3.

The twitter stream of past dh conferences document these incidents and the digital humanities community's reactions. See, for example, Katina Rogers on LLC publication statistics (<https://twitter.com/katinalynn/status/358226900616876033>), Mia Ridge on the Fortier Prize team's ([https://twitter.com/mia\\_out/status/358340856706646016](https://twitter.com/mia_out/status/358340856706646016)), Vika Zafrin on the keynote ([https://twitter.com/mia\\_out/status/358340856706646016](https://twitter.com/mia_out/status/358340856706646016)), Tully Barnett, Deb Verhoeven, and Diane Jakacki on women and Dh 2015 (<https://twitter.com/melissaterras/status/621307138070155264>).