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Evaluating Evaluation

1 The growing accessibility of digital technology has been met with an increased willingness on the part of scholars to integrate new digital methods into their interpretive and presentational practices. In a great many cases, departments and other academic units across higher education are working to fund digital innovation. At the same time, the academic assessment structures that support scholarly work have not always been able to keep pace, thus making the pursuit of digital work unreasonable, unless that work is undertaken as additional to the other kinds of scholarship already vetted by any given field or discipline.

2 Five College Digital Humanities (5CollDH) has turned to the question of assessment because we have come to understand that we cannot rightfully focus on cultivating digital scholarly innovation if we are not equally attentive to the kinds of curricular, financial, and administrative structures that make new kinds of work possible. Even when we provide curricular and financial support, faculty and staff are still left to pursue new scholarship without a readily available assurance of fairness in the administrative evaluation of that work.

3 Indeed, whether we call it “digital humanities,” “humanities computing,” “digital scholarship,” “teaching with technology,” “blended learning” or pull otherwise from the pool of myriad terms we use to talk about inquiries produced at intersections between the humanities, computing, digital frame-working, and new media technologies, educational institutions must learn to address the new workflows, timelines, and personnel management such hybrid scholarship demands. The increasing normalization of projects that fall under the general rubric of “digital humanities” (DH) has produced new opportunities for institutions to crystallize their articulations of the relationship between academic scholarship, creative making, and structures of evaluation and assessment.

4 With that in mind, 5CollDH has worked with faculty, staff, students, and community members throughout and beyond the Five College Consortium to imagine new and practical strategies for assuring fairness when assessing the work of digital humanists. How might we construe

The New Rigor: Recommendations for Assessing and Supporting Digital Scholarship in the Five Colleges
rigor flexibly, while also supporting the creative energies that drive scholarly insight? How can we build structures of evaluation, assessment, and support that encourage excellent digital work?

5 Our evaluation of evaluation began with the following facts regarding the production of digital scholarship in the Five College Consortium:

✴ A scholar’s process of becoming apprised of and deploying emerging technologies disrupts contemporary notions of professional mastery and potentially decelerates the timeline for scholarly production. As things stand, a scholar’s time is tethered to assessment: work must appear in time for the major milestones that structure academic careers—e.g. the tenure-track faculty person coming up for reappointment, the student at finals, the library staff person following a promotion cycle. Time, in the academic context, is the debt paid in the moment when a scholars’ academic production is deemed worthy of merit. This means that any program committed to digital scholarship, like 5CollDH, must thus therefore try to understand how timelines for assessment and evaluation frame humanistic inquiry itself. If we want to support new kinds of work, then we must offer scholars guidance and opportunities to maximize that frame.

✴ The collaborative nature of much digital humanities work exposes the often hidden human capital involved in producing scholarship. Institutions must therefore become more responsive to supporting humanities work that falls outside of the single-scholar monograph model. It also means recognizing staff and student contributions to scholarly work as collaborators, rather than as helpmeets or passive participants.

✴ Digital projects generally arise out of extended, grant funded, and iterative processes. In order to support this work, scholars must be given the resources to articulate projects’ component parts, and institutions must be willing to accept the development of those parts as scholarship, including for instance the copious amount of work that goes into assembling teams, setting up labs, and pursuing funding.

6 Other organizations, most notably the American Historical Association (AHA), The Modern Language
Association (MLA), the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the College Art Association (CAA), and Northeastern University (NEU), have also produced guidelines around assessment. In many places the 5CollDH determinations indeed align with those other reports. For the most part, however, our process has focused on producing more locally specific guidelines.

In particular, because of the flexibility with which we have been able to utilize our founding Mellon grant, we have witnessed the concerns of faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduates. Because 5CollDH allows project leadership to emerge as it may, we can also account for the experiences of non-faculty constituencies, rather than assume that such experiences only emerge to narrate faculty-led initiative. This is not at all to suggest that other institutions’ guidelines only account for faculty concerns, but more so to emphasize 5CollDH’s unique ability to approach structural questions from multiple perspectives at once. Digital humanities projects are almost always collaborative efforts, and any conversation that imagines one member’s concerns as more important than others threatens the sustainability of the project, as well as an institution’s capacity to support this kind of work.

Supporting “DH People”

In an influential piece of online writing titled “Commit to DH people, not DH projects,” Miriam Posner notes that institutions might be better served by focusing on how to cultivate “DH people,” active and methodologically-inquisitive scholars, rather than focusing on merely acquiring digital humanities projects. Written from her perspective as the Digital Humanities Program Coordinator at UCLA, Posner’s intervention is important because it reminds us of the broad sets of skills humanists must acquire in order to produce digital scholarship, as well as the ways in which such scholarship is often iterative, especially as the timeline for making must often overlap with the timeline of learning how and exactly what to make. What we might therefore take from Posner’s assertion is a sense of “the digital humanities” as naming a standard of inquiry, as a shared vision of how to support scholarly innovation rather than merely characterizing a kind of academic product.

To support work in the digital humanities is to create an apparatus in which a project’s development is understood as a subset of a scholar’s development, rather than a world wherein humanities scholars are “developed,” and then “produce.” This is not to say that nothing shall ever
“get done”; rather, it is an assertion of the value of careful, thoughtful, rigorous work in a world where humanistic inquiry is tied to emergent technologies and new media practices, where scholarly work is produced on constantly shifting ground.

When we turn our focus away from a model in which academic value is produced out of a thing that has yet to come into being, we are better able to identify where the structural concerns of digital humanists overlap with but also diverge from those of scholars otherwise referred to as “traditional” humanists. For while every institution must wrangle multiple priorities regarding technical, financial, or pedagogical support for “the digital humanities,” advocating such work mainly requires finding more engaged ways to support people.

This shift in focus, however, impacts the timeline for faculty development, since this cultivation requires faculty, staff, and students to agree to an ongoing process of exposure to new techniques and communities. In DH, few people are ever done cooking, and the temporal reality of what we refer to as “DH deceleration” has inevitably required digital humanists to work on their digital work in addition to their “regular”—traditionally assessable—scholarship, a phenomenon perhaps best summarized in a well-regarded 2014 Chronicle Vitae article titled “Digital Humanists: If You Want Tenure, Do Double the Work.”

**Evaluation in general**

Five College Digital Humanities has been able to support a wide range of digital humanities events and projects at our five member institutions, with an eye to fostering the adoption of new technological approaches to humanities questions. It is important to acknowledge, however, that a great many staff, students, and faculty were engaging “the digital humanities” long before the term gained any kind of structural recognition, much less legitimacy, in the world of higher ed. This means then that when we are talking about the possibilities of and impedances to digital scholarship, we must account for both old and new institutional habits accreting around such work, with an eye toward bolstering some and discarding others.

_In the following chart we have collated the findings from our examination of reports produced by national humanities organizations, and also by participants in 5CollDH’s New Rigor conferences._ (Fig. 1)
THE NEW RIGOR:
A Community Conversation on Support and Assessment for Digital Projects

FIGURE 1: TOPICS & OBJECTIVES FOR COMMITTEES:

- **Undergrads**: Develop protocols for evaluating collaborative work.
- **Grads/Post-Docs**: Consider how to evaluate as scholarship the development of tools.
- **Untenured Faculty**: Engage qualified reviewers.
- **Tenured Faculty**: Delineate and communicate responsibilities.
- **Staff**: Specify what counts as a scholarly contribution.
- **MLA**: Stay informed about developments in digital contexts of the work.
- **AHA**: Consider how to evaluate work that exists in a process of continual revision.
- **UMass DHI**: Consider how to evaluate a record of successful grant proposals.
- **Respect medium specificity when reviewing work.**
- **Stay informed about accessibility issues.**
To begin, it is worth noting that many of the obstacles associated with the assessment and evaluation of digital work also reflect larger problems concerning the evaluation, definition, and assessment of academic work in general—particularly as what constitutes "scholarship" has become categorically broadened in numerous contexts, from digital humanities, media studies, and game studies to the rise of public scholarship and community based initiatives. Regardless, a recurring theme across all the reports we have looked at is that communication about goals and expectations, and attending to matters of institutional memory are paramount. Although this seems to state the obvious, many scholars can attest to how so much of academia is ruled by long-established and therefore unspoken rules, mores, and assumptions regarding the meaningfulness or value of any given humanities inquiry.

**Evaluation particular to digital work**

There are numerous overlaps between digital scholarship and traditional humanities production because they are of the same genus. At the same time, there are of course issues more fully germane to the digital per se. This is not a problem that can be fully solved by analogy, insofar as in many cases digital work and “paper” work are not in fact the same thing, even as both can be equally rigorous in their approach. Indeed, much of what makes digital work significant is in how it allows scholars to hew an object of study to a customized interpretive mode. This challenges extant notions of what it means to ask scholarship to meet generally agreed upon standards of inquiry, presentation, and dissemination. Which values do digital humanists bring to the table? In the context of a research institution, how different are they from traditional academic values and expectations and, if different, when does this difference emerge as significant?

Per the final point above, it is again important to note that departments and units should be prepared to articulate parameters for what will constitute scholarship itself, for what will “count” and thus be assessed as a scholarly contribution, for instance successful long-form narrative grant proposals or the creation of sophisticated tools or methods that bring new dimensionality to humanities inquiry. In a tenure track context, this means that from the moment of hire it is important to begin designating departmental colleagues who can become informed about the landscape out of which the scholar’s work emerges and also, therefore, develop a sense of
scholars who might serve as project reviewers during contract renewals. In so doing, departments make opportunities for mentorship, and can hope to produce an assessment structure that has evolved with the scholar’s own work. In other words, we are recommending that every moment of assessment be undertaken as an active and mutually constitutive process articulated in preparation for the next milestone, rather than as merely an accounting and assessment thereof.

Further, in every case of scholarship that falls outside of a previously documented model an accounting should be made regarding what will constitute meaningful progress, and by which standard progress will be assessed, and by whom.

In staff contexts, it is also important to understand the particular exigencies of digital work, so that a newly hired staff person can be given berth to find ways to manage his or her time, for instance seeking a proper balance between what is generally understood as “desk time” and also the more independent or consultation time that is often more amenable to working with others on digital projects. Otherwise, staff members collaborating on digital projects risk that work cutting into non-compensated time, another version of doing “double the work.”

A note on collaboration

Our Five College constituencies have expressed a sense that humanities disciplines are in general characterized by the absence of robust guidelines around matters of attribution and collaboration, and that this is a deterrent to scholars’ willingness to develop communities of practice. Indeed, it is a common understanding that, for many humanists, working with others does not “count” as much toward tenure and promotion as work done alone. Not only is this concerning for DH scholars, it also penalizes scholars invested in emerging fields, since the forerunner texts are often edited volumes.

Further, as scholars who work in a staff capacity are careful to remind, it is important for all of us to remember that the work of the humanist has historically seldom ever been work done in isolation. What has changed, and the digital context makes this more apparent, is how we talk about the multiple layers of
labor that undergirds scholarly work—the mass of researchers, transcribers, copyeditors, translators, field runners, editors, etc. who are often the engine behind scholarship—even when only one name appears on the cover of the monograph. This means, then, that supporting campus digital humanities also means developing evaluation, time management, and compensation structures that reflect how different employees who are not hired as teaching staff regardless participate in both curricula and in the production of scholarship. Faculty, staff, and students all benefit from being able to point to their specific contributions to a project, valuable as both individual work but also because it is part of a larger collaborative enterprise.
The 5CollDH Recommendations

✴ Continue to key the 5CollDH speaker series to speakers whose critical, methodological, or technological approach broadens and deepens the Five College community’s understanding of what is “happening” in the digital valences of our local scholars’ fields.

✴ Partner with local academic presses to produce peer-reviewed publications of local digital work, vetted through processes of open peer review and published in open access forms. We will particularly encourage shorter pieces that demonstrate the argument, spirit, or context of longer, iterative digital projects. This will help loop scholars into the larger DH community, while also providing local exposure for their work, as it proceeds.

✴ Articulate and support open access documentation practices. These practices should complement or mirror many of the documentation requirements established as important to a project’s assessment with multiple uses.

✴ Establish a 5CollDH ad hoc committee on the assessment of digital work. This flexibly constituted committee would follow digital work across the long arc of its process, namely as such work moves in parallel to other touchstones in tenure and promotion or contract renewal timelines. This is also to alleviate scholars’ concerns that assessment committees only step in at the very end of long, multi-year endeavors and judge a single “product,” rather than producing recommendations based in their witnessing of an iterative process.
From Scholars’ Responsibilities to General Best Practices

During the review of other organizations’ reports on evaluation and assessment, participants in *The New Rigor* meetings were struck by how the American Historical Association (AHA) digital scholarship guidelines are careful to recommend that scholars also carry some of the burden for making sure their work arrives at an assessment audience that is ready to receive it.

In the chart on the following page, we have collated the findings from both examination of reports produced by national humanities organizations, and also participants in *The New Rigor* conferences. (Fig. 2)
THE NEW RIGOR:
A Community Conversation on Support and Assessment for Digital Projects

FIGURE 2: TOPICS & OBJECTIVES FOR SCHOLARS:

- Undergrads: Ask about evaluation and support (especially in developing portfolios).
- Grads/Post-Docs: Negotiate and document your role.
- Untenured Faculty: Document and explain your work.
- Tenured Faculty: Explain and document the development, progress, and contributions.
- Staff: Bring colleagues into your project.
- MLA: Consider how the processes and procedures of evaluation will impact your plans.
- AHA: Be clear about the expectations of deadlines and evaluation.
- UMass DHi:
There are two AHA recommendations, however, in the context of our own report, for they reflect significant discussions that arose during the New Rigor process. Before initiating a digital project and throughout the course of the project, you should be prepared to explain and document its development and progress and its contributions to scholarship. These statements should be discussed with chairs and committee heads to make sure everyone is operating with the same expectations. Bring colleagues into your project, taking advantage of opportunities to explain how your work contributes to the scholarly conversation in on-campus forums, professional meetings, and print or online publications. If you establish collaborations and alliances, make sure your department and institution are fully informed at each step.

Implementation

Much of any broad recommendation regarding the assessment of digital scholarship should reflect institutional best practices around the assessment of scholarship more generally, which is to say that such recommendations must be undergirded by transparent mechanisms. One goal of the New Rigor process was to produce guidelines that could be implemented in the Five Colleges now. The spirit of our recommendations should be portable to other institutions but, again, they are ultimately constructed to adapt and extend extant Five College structures and habits.

The AHA and other organizations have given us very useful guidelines, staked on the importance of assuring that scholars producing digital work should expect their work to be evaluated in as much an environment of fairness as scholars working in more traditional media. It is important to note, however, that the work of inclusion so critical to successful assessment potentially layers additional work requirements on digital humanists. In the immediate future, we propose to mitigate some of this additional burden in several ways.

- Continuing to key the 5CollDH speaker series to speakers whose critical, methodological, or technological approach broadens and deepens the Five College community’s understanding of what is “happening” in the digital valences of our local scholars’ fields.
- Partnering with local academic presses to produce peer-reviewed publications of local
digital work, vetted through processes of open peer review and published in open access forms. We will particularly encourage shorter pieces that demonstrate the argument, spirit, or context of longer, iterative digital projects. This will help loop scholars into the larger DH community, while also providing local exposure for their work.

✴ Articulating project documentation practices that contribute to some of the goals of successful documentation for assessment: one process with multiple uses.

✴ Establishing a 5CollDH ad hoc committee on the assessment of digital work. This flexibly constituted committee would follow digital work across the long arc of its process, namely as such work moves in parallel to other touchstones in tenure and promotion or contract renewal timelines. This is to alleviate scholars’ concerns that assessment committees only step in at the very end of long, multi-year endeavors and judge a single “product,” rather than producing recommendations based in their witnessing of an iterative process.

5 Throughout the New Rigor process, we were very aware of our constituents’ sense that units across the academic enterprise want to do as much as they can to make sure that scholars are treated fairly. But fairness itself requires multilateral commitment to transparency and a shared attention to detail that is difficult to sustain over the course of a scholar’s work. This difficulty is compounded by the iterative and often collaborative nature of digital work. In the following pages we will say more regarding the last two items on the 5CollDH action list, documentation practice and ad hoc committee formation. These two items are at the heart of our recommendation because they are as useful to strategies for mutual mentorship and communication as they are to the work of assessment.


6 A key concern for participants throughout The New Rigor process has been that of accurately representing and understanding iteration: DH projects are rarely, if ever, “completed” or “fixed” in the manner of a monograph. Instead they evolve over time and across teams of
scholars whose individual contributions must be articulated within the broader work. Establishing Five College best practices for documenting iterative work will help to

✴ Document collaborative efforts, while allowing better articulation of individual contributions and overall reporting to funding institutions

✴ Demonstrate pathways for other scholars interested in undertaking similar kinds of work, thus helping digital scholars avoid feeling like they must reinvent the wheel at every turn

✴ Produce multiple entry points for people interested in a given person or team’s digital scholarship, thus better enabling mentorship, advice, and opportunities for future collaboration.

✴ Model research and documentation practices that help various constituencies understand iteration and “failure” as valuable and fruitful stages in DH research projects.

7 In keeping with campus’ increased interest in open access, 5CollDH recommends modeling documentation best practices on those popular in open-source software communities, which utilize low-bar version control software such as GitHub to manage assets and track contributions across multiple users. 5CollDH will offer online or in person training for digital scholars, so that they can learn to integrate documentation at the beginning rather than end of their processes.

8 Documenting iteration also greatly assists the kinds of reporting required by grant foundations and assessment committees, and as well models pathways for future DH scholars. In “How Did They Make That?” Miriam Posner urges DH practitioners to imagine ways of “reverse engineering” successful projects in order to break through the stymieing experience of having an idea for a DH project but not knowing how to execute it. In this way, documentation also helps broaden scholars’ reach into larger communities of practice, a pathway to various kinds of mentorship, and also brings varying levels of peer review into DH work throughout the scholarly process.

A note regarding documenting “failure”

9 Some constituents in the New Rigor process reported that feeling like they cannot talk about failed
approaches stymies their commitment to experimentation. This is despite the fact that, in broader conversations about digital humanities, “failure” is often invoked to describe when a scholar’s approach to a problem will not solve the problem, but the process nonetheless offers great insight into how a humanities inquiry and digital approaches are mutually constitutive. This is especially true in scholarly environments of robust procedural documentation, insofar as the documentation of failure pushes the larger scholarly community’s work forward. It is our hope, therefore, that normalizing documentation helps de-stigmatize notions of formal experimentation in the humanities.

**Recommendation:**

**5CollDH Ad Hoc Committees for the Assessment of Digital Work**

Assessing digital projects requires evaluators at all levels both to embrace new ways of considering such work and to interrogate extant practices in order to reveal hidden gaps, deficiencies, and assumptions regarding the meaningfulness and value of diverse academic approaches to scholarship. This as much to re-conceptualize traditional assessment practice in light of the affordances of digital work as to consider how digital projects can profit from disciplinary wisdom. With that in mind, 5CollDH recommends that we be given dispensation to assemble ad hoc committees able to contribute evaluations for digital projects in the Five Colleges.

We take as our model the ad hoc assessment process for Five College professors who are appointed across institutions. Departments faced with the challenge of evaluating a candidate with a digital project can contact 5CollDH to assemble an ad hoc committee. Again, it is preferable, though not necessary, that this happen well before the actual assessment process. This evaluation would stand in addition to the department’s regular practice, and to be included in the scholar’s dossier as it moves across the college or university. In this way, ad hoc committees can help departments more comfortably assure fairness in evaluating non-traditional work.
Here is the broad outline for what we are proposing.

- An ad hoc committee for digital assessment will be a group of three to five people, chaired by a senior member of the 5CollDH steering committee, and constituted from 5CollDH committee membership, Five College faculty and staff members, and/or or external experts from peer institutions, according to the project’s needs.

- Committees will work closely with departments to meet their specific needs, with an eye to developing its assessment in ways that are aligned with the project’s medium and other formal specificities of the digital work. Ideally the committee will include people appointed to evaluate the project earlier rather than later in the scholar’s process.

- Candidates for evaluation will decide whether or not to engage this Five College process and will be asked to recommend colleagues to his or her committee throughout the tenure and/or promotion timeline.

- We recommend incentivizing participation on ad hoc committees by considering them as equivalent to other forms of recognized institutional service. Participating in an ad hoc committee requires not only providing a careful reading of a candidate’s digital work; it also entails staying on top of broader institutional standards and best practices for creating and evaluating digital work in the field more broadly. Ad hoc committee members are also, as 5CollDH steering committee members, ambassadors to the Five College community.

Ad hoc committees can also provide a vital service by assembling a range of examples of successful digital portfolios relevant to the work being evaluated, which will help departments contextualize digital work both within and beyond their home institutions. Assembling a useful compendium of past examples will help bridge the practice divide that complicates departments’ assessment of digital work. In effect, the work of ad hoc committees is as much about educating departments as offering specific readings of individual cases.

**Conclusion**

In closing, we want to take a moment to say a bit about working with undergraduates, as offering support for this constituency has helped us think about generative assessment structures. (Due to the construction of our...
founding grant, we are unable to fund work by individual graduate students; however graduate students participated in The New Rigor process.) At Five College Digital Humanities, we believe that student engagement with innovative digital work is the cornerstone of supporting inquisitive scholar networks. Professors and staff members at all levels are inspired and galvanized by students who come to them with ideas for their own digital projects, students whose sense of possibility has been enlivened by experiences both within and beyond the classroom. Over the past three years, we’ve had students design virtual reality games to explore embodiment and racism, build mapping tools that visualize feminist and punk zine networks, create interactive public robotic sculptures that challenge how we relate to consumer technologies, and more.

As you might imagine, our undergraduate DH projects deeply challenge disciplinary, methodological, and technical boundaries, thus illustrating the many assessment challenges we have tried to outline in our report. What is this? How do I frame my understanding of its goals or significance to other discourses? Every project brings its own unique set of assessment challenges. But in our own process of helping undergraduates to think critically and instrumentally about shepherding a long-form digital project from conception to completion, we also develop a tandem sense of how to evaluate it. When watching a DH project “become,” it is much easier to explicate its meaningfulness and success as an endeavor.

That said, students working with our program have noted that they would be far more hesitant to do their digital work in the context of a class, precisely because they would be unwilling to risk an unfair or unsuccessful assessment process. Such anecdotes have helped 5CollDH articulate how the culture of fear wrought by the institutionalization of unsuccessful assessment practice is antithetical to the spirit of creative work in the humanities. It is our hope that—by emphasizing early-term communication between individuals and their institutions; educating the Five College community about the terrain of digital studies; supporting digital inquiry holistically, and offering resources for better documentation and therefore project growth—we can help digital practitioners experience institutional assessment as one part of a much larger, generative, process.
II: The New Rigor: Process

1. It is worth taking a moment to document the process through which we arrived at this report. In Spring of 2015, Five College Digital Humanities (5CollDH) invited students, staff, and faculty, locally and nationally, to participate in *The New Rigor*, a year-long series of events focused on identifying and addressing problems in the assessment of digital scholarship. We held a Spring event, a summer of homework, and a closing fall event, asking numerous members of different Five College constituencies to work together toward identifying institutional challenges and brainstorming pathways for implementation.

2. After several years of programming—for instance educating faculty, staff, and students about new technologies, funding and managing large-scale DH projects in the Valley, sponsoring numerous student small-grant projects, ushering several cohorts of undergraduate DH fellows, attending national DH conferences, and curating a well-regarded speaker series
— 5CollDH has developed a clear sense of how to characterize many of the barriers to humanities scholars engaging digital work. We found, however, that many of the barriers we could identify had less to do with technical capacity, and more with time—namely potential digital scholars’ legitimate unease around the question of how their investment in digital work would likely be incommensurate with their institutions’ extant mores and habits. In inviting the Five College community to join The New Rigor, we noted that:

The New Rigor is a conference about the evaluation and assessment of digital work. Our idea is to begin a conversation about the structures to which scholars are held accountable. Every scholar cares very deeply about assessment, but rarely do we talk about it as a space for active intervention. The New Rigor is an opportunity for a variety of academic stakeholders to self-consciously approach matters of evaluation and assessment.

3 By opening our process in this way, we were trying to articulate how matters of assessment and evaluation drive the conversation around digital work because many departments and units want assurance that work will be ultimately valuable, often before the work is undertaken. The idea of evaluation, therefore, produces a scholar’s sense of the work’s value. And while this structure is understandable, we can see how it might be unfriendly to innovation. The invite continued:

*If you could start from scratch, what structure of evaluation or assessment—in terms of peer review, tenure and promotion, or student research experience—would encourage you to do digital work? How might we construe evaluation and assessment as generative processes, rather than as merely restrictive ones?*

The May 2, 2015 conversation is a first step toward developing a community sense of how we might construe rigor flexibly, as a tenet that supports the creative energies that drive different kinds of scholarly insight.

We would like to hear from arts and humanities faculty at all levels, and also from the numerous staff members invested in creating and supporting digital work. We are also asking undergraduate and graduate students to join this endeavor, because complex questions about evaluation and assessment determine their paths
as well. Each stakeholder group will be engaged in a moderated conversation tailored to that group’s concerns. By so doing, we hope to create safe spaces for honestly engaging the problems that matter most to each group. The day’s events are bookended with showcases of student work, to help remind us of the vigorous and creative inquires that investing in the digital humanities can make possible.

The New Rigor | conference

The first iteration of The New Rigor (TNR1) took place on May 2, 2015. There were 44 people in physical or Skype attendance for the daylong conference, which was immediately proceeded in the morning by our Five College Digital Humanities Student Fellows Symposium. We were able to gather a diverse group of digital scholars from across the five institutions, as well as graduate students from the City University of New York— The Graduate Center, Brown University, and Cornell University. TNR1 was explicitly framed as a working conference, and we used the participants’ registration data to configure workgroups. This allowed participants to self-identify into the groups, but also allowed us to make a few useful mentorship adjustments, for instance the tenure-track faculty group included recently tenured faculty who could speak to the process, and the graduate student group included a post-doc who could speak to transitioning from that group to the next while doing digital work, and so on.

Taking as our starting point a draft of the AHA’s “Guidelines for the Professional Evaluation of Digital Scholarship by Historians,” we asked members of the five self-identified constituencies to take TNR1 as an opportunity to draft notes characterizing the specific concerns of their group. Prior to TNR1, attendees were given copies of the AHA report, as well as a link to the Modern Language Association’s (MLA) 2012 report on...
digital work. For reference, they were also asked to familiarize themselves with the AHA’s characterization of what constitutes digital work. Terms like “digital humanities” and “digital scholarship” cover a broad range of research, artistic, and representational practices, and it was therefore useful to set some parameters for the kinds of work we were focusing on in our various conversations.

**New Rigor II:**
*a follow-up work session*

As follow-up to the TNR1 conference, we gave participants the summer to think about the conversations we had in May, adding any additional points to their online group notes, perusing the notes produced by other groups, and so on. On Friday October 16, 2015 we held the second *New Rigor* gathering (TNR2). For this second session we had a little under 30 people in attendance—roughly two-thirds of whom had not been attendance at the first conference.

This second meeting was a two-hour work-session focused on ratifying the fall and summer notes. It was also an opportunity for 5CollDH to hear more Five College community members’ thoughts on the ongoing *New Rigor* process and findings. As with the first conference, we were able to produce a robust set of collaborative online notes to which participants from both conferences were asked to contribute. As a result of this process, the 5CollDH steering committee was able to zoom in on the primary areas for intervention, as well as to develop a more descriptive approach to characterizing what our community members experience as institutional shortcomings around the assessment of digital work.
AHA Digital Project Categories

**Large-scale collaborations:** These types of projects can involve many different types of work and roles over a several years. They are often grant funded and include participants from several institutions. In some cases projects such as these combine a research focus with infrastructure development (e.g. digital tool creation). Project leaders are usually senior academics or managerial staff (library, IT), but these projects often employ early career academics in a variety of roles such as transcription, data collecting, project management, outreach. Departments hiring early career staff should be open to the kinds of knowledge and skills that can be developed working on these projects. While the work done by early career scholars on the project isn’t always directly related to their field of study, the experience they gain can be a valuable addition to a department.

**Small-scale web-based projects:** Smaller projects abound in the realm of digital scholarship. They can be often just an historian who has experience developing websites or using particular tools, or a collaboration between a few individuals. Usually they are either unfunded or have received a modest amount of funding. As with traditional publications these projects are usually driven by a research question. In some cases the website allows the researcher to both gather and present information, often through visualization. Examples of this sort of project include Geography of the Post and Visualizing Emancipation.

**Digital media for communication about scholarship:** This category would include individual and group scholarly blogs, and the use of social media for scholarly means. The scholarship being presented is not necessarily transformed by digital technology but the use of new media might help in showcasing research, connecting with other scholars working on the same field, public and classroom education, etc.

**Teaching focused use of digital tools:** There is a growing use of digital tools in the classroom at all levels, but especially with undergraduates. This is occurring across the curriculum, not only in classes that are explicitly focused on digital history. It can take a variety of forms, including assignments requiring students to write blogs, collaborative or individual website development, or crowdsourcing. Utilizing widely-used applications such as spreadsheets and databases in history education is also potentially valuable. See http://mcclurken.org/ and http://michellemoravec.com/ for examples of work in this area.

**Use of digital tools as research aid:** Projects that use digital tools and methods for source collection, management, and analysis can result in either traditional or digital publications. The use of digital tools is, in many cases, about the application of new methodologies to traditional modes of historical inquiry. Major methodological areas in which this is currently a factor include tools for textual analysis (e.g. text mining, natural language processing), historical geographical information systems, network analysis, and data visualization.

The New Rigor: Recommendations for Assessing and Supporting Digital Scholarship in the Five Colleges
3 : References


The New Rigor I Workgroup Notes


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Tenure-Track Faculty, “Green,” bit.ly/NewRigor_TT

Tenured Faculty & Administrators, “Purple,” bit.ly/NewRigor_Tenured

Section III
4: Acknowledgements

Of all the many endeavors we take up in the digital humanities, assessment and evaluation is probably the least interesting thing we can focus on. But we have also learned that all the good and amazing things must themselves be supported, and intervening in administrative structures is one way to help that work.

With that in mind, Five College Digital Humanities would like to thank everyone who participated in the various phases of The New Rigor community process:

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Appendix:

Community Tweets
from The New Rigor I
The New Rigor: Recommendations for Assessing and Supporting Digital Scholarship in the Five Colleges
Appendix: Community Tweets

Eric Poehler
Pompeiana79
@Pompeiana79 or like this: #NewRigor #5collDH http://t.co/bD9zj4BU0c

0 Retweets
Sat May 02 19:09:59 +0000 2015

Emily Esten
sheishistoric
"How do we get our non-DH peers to understand what we do?" - @Pompeiana79 #newrigor #5cdh

0 Retweets
Sat May 02 19:20:21 +0000 2015

Byzantine Cappadocia
ByzCapp
#NewRigor My questions are large and existential!

0 Retweets
Sat May 02 19:28:52 +0000 2015

Eric Poehler
Pompeiana79
@byzCapp "that is why God made Borbon" says @amplify285 #NewRigor #5collDH

1 Retweets
Sat May 02 19:30:06 +0000 2015

Byzantine Cappadocia
ByzCapp
Thanks @5collDH @amplify285 for facilitating a great #NewRigor conversation. Necessary, tough ideas brought up today!

2 Retweets
Sat May 02 19:32:35 +0000 2015

Ecstatic Pessimist
EcstaticPesse
#5cdh #newrigor
http://t.co/oeWXjvpzEq

1 Retweets
Sat May 02 19:54:50 +0000 2015

Andy Anderson
EduObservatory
In the sciences, both new discoveries and the development and creative use of technology are valued. Why not in the humanities? #NewRigor

0 Retweets
Sat May 02 23:00:48 +0000 2015