

## Introduction

Good morning and thank you all for your time and attention this morning. [More about the library etc.] I am going to get to the prompt to respect all of your time.

This is a big question and an exciting question. For me, imagining the future is an exercise in speculative fiction. That happens to be one of my favorite genres to read. Speculative fiction allows us to identify what is core to what we do without being beholden to it. This future has a relationship to but not fidelity to our present moment. Exercises in imagination are how we start to move toward something better, and this is how I approached this prompt.

There are two parts to my presentation. First, I'll consider the state of the field and ask ourselves what is digital scholarship and what do digital scholarship centers do? This survey of the field will help us contextualize the Freedman Center in the broader field landscape of library services at peer institutions. Secondly, I'll talk about future opportunities in digital scholarships and for digital scholarship centers.

## State of the Field

Let's consider: what is "digital scholarship" and the specific iteration of a digital scholarship center. I begin here because there is not a settled definition in the literature of what digital scholarship is or does. Melanie Schlosser defines digital scholarship as "research and teaching that is made possible by digital technologies, or that takes advantage of them to ask and answer questions in new ways." This definition is broad, and its breadth is part of a contested space in general. Some scholars argue that since most scholarship uses digital technology of some kind, the term *digital scholarship* is empty of significant meaning.

I take a less cynical perspective as a digital scholar, specifically a digital humanist. In my experience, digital scholarship becomes legible as a descriptive term when the application of technology is novel or a change from how a field has developed. For example, no one is surprised that a computer scientist is learning how to use MatLab, although that would be called digital scholarship in the broadest sense. In contrast, the application of MySQL and Python to the humanities sparked a contested revolution that we are still grappling with, with volumes and volumes of struggles to define what it is we do and its relationship to traditional humanities scholarship. It is this experience that I find useful to give language and a name to, along with many of my peers in the humanities, education, social sciences, and libraries.

More in line with what I have experienced, Martin Weller argues that the term digital scholarship is useful when we have the combination of three aspects: digital, networked, and open. It is the application of digital tools, yes, but with an emphasis on collaboration and challenging traditional hierarchies in the academy that particularly animates Weller's vision of digital scholarship. I share many of these hopes as someone who has predominately worked on open-access digital projects and researches the development of linked data structures in British print. I have seen how much we grow as a team when we work in collaboration despite my field's focus

on single authorship and when we publish in venues that welcome all rather than seeking prestige and rejection rates.

As another datapoint, Lindsey Martin updates Ernest Boyer's classic definition of scholarship to consider what digital scholarship might be in this framework. [DISCUSS SLIDE]

To transition, digital scholarship centers, then, serve communities of these scholars ... many of whom are unsure of whether or not they are digital scholars and may or may not be intentionally engaging this field. Many of these users are digital methodology curious, with questions and problems but not clear ideas about what we do or what they're doing. It makes sense, then, that there is not a clear sense of what all digital scholarship centers do or should do. Wiggins et al. surveyed digital scholarship centers to try to note major trends. They identified that centers are present in three quarters of R1 institutions like Case Western, and many are in conversation with makerspaces and other similar initiatives. There are many variables, but here are some of the trends that are useful for us. These centers tend to:

- Be housed in libraries with connections to other departments
- Be staffed by librarians, curators, and archivists; technologists; faculty; administrative staff; postdocs; and student workers
- Serve a critical function at the intersection of technology and research, teaching, and engagement
- Be misunderstood and underutilized by administrators and users

What I hope that we have gathered from this foray into the literature is that the present is as speculative as the future I am about to explore. What we have here is less settled dogma and more vibes, as the kids say. Unsettledness is also possibility, so let's talk about some of those.

## **Vision**

The future of digital scholarship builds from this contested present. As with the best speculative fiction, my future reveals my own values as an academic and teacher and how my values align with those of Case Western.

Digital Scholarship will always encounter new tools and methodologies. Rather than overly invest in one way of doing things, the field must focus on adaptability and flexibility so we are prepared to analyze and interpret technology rather than just passively use it.

- humanities education as this kind of approach to tools; teach wide skillset and critical thinking / approaches, rather than one specific way of thinking

In terms of digital scholarship centers, I do not believe that they are a fad—something often argued about digital humanities programs, as well, and usually by those who do not understand them rather than those who use them. Rather, I see this as the first established spaces for what will become the norm in academia. Accordingly, DS Centers will continue to be interdisciplinary hubs for skill development, professionalization, and low-stakes experimentation and play.

To be more concrete, I see two ways that digital scholarship will flourish in the coming decades. The first is focused on areas of *growth*. This identifies what we already do well and how we will develop these services and interventions to continue to meet users' needs. The second area is *leadership*. This considers what areas digital scholarship is particularly well positioned to lead in and how we can push the conversation forward on campus and more broadly. I've broken each of these down into smaller pieces that I'll go through now.

First, I'll focus on areas of growth.

1. Adaptability and Flexibility - ESTC
2. Equity Gaps – maker studio
3. **Summary slide**

Next, I'll address areas where digital scholarship is well positioned to be a leader in the field

1. Progressive instruction and support
2. Critical studies in digital scholarship
3. Communities of all kinds
4. **Summary Slide**