

Practices and Implications for Enhancing Librarians' Digital Scholarship Service Capabilities at the University of Florida Libraries: A Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Librarians' digital scholarship service capabilities serve as a critical foundation for delivering high-quality digital scholarship services. An in-depth analysis of practical projects undertaken by academic libraries abroad to enhance librarians' digital scholarship service capabilities can provide valuable references and insights for domestic academic libraries. [Method/Process] This study examines the "Developing Librarians" program implemented by the Digital Humanities Library Group at the University of Florida. Through literature review and web-based research methods, the investigation analyzes the program's implementation experience from three dimensions: implementation background, implementation characteristics, and outcome evaluation. [Results/Conclusion] The "Developing Librarians" program effectively enhanced librarians' skills and confidence in providing digital scholarship services and stimulated greater willingness and interest among librarians to engage in such services, while leveraging limited personnel, funding, and space resources. It is recommended that domestic academic libraries, drawing on these experiences, should focus on enhancing librarians' digital scholarship service capabilities through four approaches: top-down advocacy of digital scholarship service concepts, progressive design of librarian competency training programs, in-depth conduct of project outcome evaluation, and internally-driven establishment of digital scholarship practice communities.

Full Text

Preamble

Title: Practices and Implications from the University of Florida Libraries' Enhancement of Librarians' Digital Scholarship Service Capabilities

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Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] The digital scholarship service capability of librarians serves as a crucial guarantee for delivering high-quality digital scholarship services. An in-depth analysis of practical projects implemented by foreign university libraries to enhance librarians' digital scholarship service capabilities can provide valuable references for domestic university libraries. [Method/Process] This study examines the "Developing Librarian Pilot Training Project" (DLPTP) implemented by the Digital Humanities Library Group (DHLG) at the University of Florida. Through literature and web-based research, the paper investigates the project's implementation experience from three perspectives: background, characteristics, and effectiveness evaluation. [Results/Conclusions] The DLPTP effectively enhanced librarians' skills and confidence in providing digital scholarship services while stimulating their willingness and interest to participate, despite limited human resources, funding, and space. Drawing from these experiences, domestic university libraries should focus on four key areas: (1) advocating digital scholarship service concepts from top-down, (2) designing librarian training programs that progress from basic to advanced levels, (3) conducting project effectiveness evaluations that emphasize process over outcomes, and (4) establishing digital scholarship practice communities that foster internal and external collaboration.

Keywords: digital scholarship; digital scholarship services; university librarian; capacity enhancement; digital literacy

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0 Introduction

Since its inception, the concept of digital scholarship has continuously evolved, with scholars from various disciplines emphasizing the use of digital methods and tools to support research and create new technologies. In 2022, China's Ministry of Education officially launched the Education Digitalization Strategy to advance digital transformation nationwide and build a learning society for all. In higher education, digital scholarship has become both a source of innovation and a driver of technological adoption. From a library perspective, definitions tend to be more expansive. For instance, the University of Michigan Library explicitly states that any teaching, research, or curricular project relying on digital methods or tools constitutes digital scholarship. Similarly, the Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship at McMaster University views digital scholarship as dynamically evolving alongside new digital methods while maintaining its academic core.

Despite this recognition, most Chinese university libraries face budget con-

straints and significant resource gaps compared to elite institutions. Key challenges include a shortage of digital scholarship service professionals and the pressing question of how to enhance existing librarians' capabilities. Digital scholarship services refer to library support that spans the entire research life-cycle, addressing interdisciplinary collaboration needs by leveraging emerging information technologies to excavate and utilize diverse academic resources. These services encompass establishing digital collections, creating or adapting tools for analysis, and developing platforms for new knowledge products. While domestic research has acknowledged the importance of reconstructing librarians' digital scholarship service capabilities, practical training projects remain scarce. This study focuses on the University of Florida's DLPTP to provide operational insights for Chinese libraries.

1 Domestic and International Research and Practice

International university libraries have pioneered digital scholarship services, with training content covering theoretical knowledge, technical skills, communication abilities, and leadership. Training formats are diverse, ranging from professional courses to short-term intensive workshops. Harvard University Libraries' "Fundamentals of Digital Scholarship" seminar discusses digital library technologies, resources, and development directions, while Yale University Libraries offers specialized courses for digital humanities librarians. The Association of Research Libraries' 2016 SPEC Kit 350 survey identified the most frequent services as collection digitization, digital exhibitions, data curation, GIS and digital mapping, and project planning. A 2019 survey by Research Libraries UK revealed significant skill gaps in visualization, computational text analysis, GIS support, and statistical analysis.

To address these gaps, libraries employ various training models. CURATE-camp organizes unconference-style intensive training on digital curation, while the University of Maryland offers semester-long seminar series covering project development and grant writing. Harvard has established digital scholarship communities, and Simon Fraser University collaborates internationally on digital humanities education. Most libraries appoint digital scholarship librarians through dedicated recruitment or internal selection, though some projects rely on student assistants. Columbia University Libraries developed a two-year training program emphasizing leadership and interpersonal skills. Building on this model, the University of Florida's DHLG created the DLPTP to cultivate digital humanities skills using limited resources, aiming to boost librarians' confidence and participation.

2 The University of Florida Libraries’ “Developing Librarian” Project

2.1 Implementation Background

The University of Florida (UF), founded in 1853, is Florida’s oldest and largest public research university. In December 2011, UF established the Digital Humanities Working Group, co-convened by three faculty from the George A. Smathers Libraries and English Department. This interdisciplinary group regularly discussed the intersection of digital technology and humanities. While some librarians participated in this university-level group, the library recognized the need for a librarian-centered community to address growing digital humanities service demands. Consequently, the Digital Humanities Library Group (DHLG) was formed in January 2014 as a voluntary organization where members shared interests without questioning digital scholarship’s value or libraries’ central role. However, members acknowledged their skill gaps, prompting DHLG to design the DLPTP to develop practical capabilities.

2.2 Implementation Characteristics

Top-Level Training Design: DHLG met approximately every three weeks to discuss digital humanities librarianship issues. Based on member feedback, UF’s digital scholarship coordinator developed training modules covering: (1) creating professional digital identities on platforms like Google+, Academia.edu, and LinkedIn; (2) project management and collaboration; (3) special and area studies collections; (4) digital project planning and management; (5) digitization and digital production topics; (6) metadata guidelines; and (7) additional training on SEO, Wikipedia, GIS, and TEI encoding.

Collaborative Project Charter Development: To align member expectations, DHLG held a workshop on charter development. Members collaboratively created a comprehensive document detailing project scope, deliverables, outcomes, target audiences, roles and responsibilities, timelines, constraints, communication methods, and deadlines. This process itself became a portfolio piece for participants’ tenure and promotion files.

Dedicated Funding: DHLG secured approximately \$5,000 in library funding to cover external trainers from Columbia University and Carnegie Mellon University, ensuring the pilot’s smooth implementation. The project ultimately delivered 16 training sessions ranging from 1-3 hours, with some full-day intensive workshops.

Independent Collaborative Space: Following advice from peer institutions, DHLG proposed establishing the Scott Nygren Scholars Studio—a dedicated space for digital humanities activities. The studio features a 90-inch LED display, 70-inch interactive touchscreen, mobile furniture, and computers equipped with specialized software including Camtasia, Oxygen XML Editor, and GIS tools. This environment encourages creative thinking and collaborative learn-

ing.

Group-Based Learning: The “learning by doing” philosophy underpinned the training design. Beyond technical workshops, DHLG launched an online exhibition project using the Baldwin Library of Historical Children’s Literature’s digitized collection. Members formed four groups focusing on TEI encoding, blogging, Omeka exhibition design, and project management. This hands-on approach enabled direct skill acquisition through collaborative practice.

2.3 Project Effectiveness Evaluation

DHLG employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative assessments.

Quantitative Evaluation: Using a 5-point Likert scale, participants completed pre- and post-training assessments for each session. Statistical analysis showed increased mean scores across all measures, indicating enhanced knowledge, skills, and confidence in digital humanities.

[Figure 1: see original paper]

Qualitative Evaluation: Feedback was collected through the library’s training system and a focus group. Questions explored which information was most valuable, potential applications, and improvement suggestions. The focus group examined ten key areas including skill improvement, new work habits, collaboration confidence, and project enhancement ideas.

Participants praised the project-based learning approach for creating a supportive community and exposing them to diverse tools. However, some criticized the emphasis on deliverables over learning process and noted time constraints limited depth. The evaluation revealed several outcomes: (1) creation of a digital exhibition with data visualizations, (2) TEI-encoded texts, (3) integration of training modules into the library’s formal curriculum, (4) establishment of a digital humanities practitioner network, and (5) peer-reviewed publications by participating librarians. The project also spawned a two-day DH Bootcamp attracting 60 campus scholars and contributed to the creation of a graduate digital humanities curriculum that grew from 7 to 24 students between 2015-2016.

3 Implications and Recommendations

China’s university libraries remain in early exploration stages of digital scholarship services, facing challenges including low librarian awareness, resource constraints, and practical difficulties in capacity building. Drawing from UF’s experience, four recommendations emerge:

3.1 Top-Down Advocacy for Digital Scholarship Philosophy

Library leadership should integrate digital scholarship services into long-term strategic planning, clearly articulating librarians’ potential roles. This top-down

advocacy helps overcome resistance from traditionally-minded staff and motivates librarians to develop digital competencies and lifelong learning mindsets. As DLPTP participants noted, the learning process itself—despite involving some failure—creates unique value and boosts professional development willingness.

3.2 Progressive Design of Librarian Training Programs

Training should progress from foundational to advanced levels, beginning with digital awareness and critical thinking before moving to technical skills like data analysis, visualization, and project management. Project-based training that combines theory with practice enables librarians to master digital scholarship principles through hands-on application. UF's model of 1-2 hour sessions with occasional full-day workshops, supplemented by collaborative project work, offers a sustainable approach.

3.3 Process-Oriented Project Evaluation

Most Chinese library training programs rely on informal post-training satisfaction surveys. Instead, evaluation should be embedded throughout the implementation process, emphasizing learning progression over final deliverables. Mixed-methods assessment combining quantitative metrics with qualitative feedback provides iterative improvement data. As DLPTP demonstrated, focusing on process helps capture the most impactful learning experiences.

3.4 Building Digital Scholarship Practice Communities

A practice community comprises people with shared interests who improve through regular interaction. Libraries can establish internal digital scholarship interest groups comprising volunteer subject and liaison librarians. These groups can conduct “business exchange + skills training” activities, leveraging internal expertise while seeking external partnerships with campus departments, publishers, and research institutions. This inside-out approach builds a sustainable digital scholarship ecosystem without requiring extensive new hires or infrastructure, ultimately fostering a collaborative network that supports both librarian growth and researcher needs.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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