

# DIGITAL HUMANITIES IN ACTION

HOW ACADEMIC LIBRARIES PLAY A  
PROMINENT ROLE IN ADVANCING  
DIGITAL HUMANITIES ON CAMPUS



# DIGITAL CAPABILITIES ARE TRANSFORMING THE STUDY OF HUMANITIES

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The use of digital humanities capabilities, such as geographic information system (GIS) mapping, data visualizations, and text mining, is transforming the study of humanities at colleges and universities worldwide—and academic libraries are playing a central role in guiding the use of these technologies.

In fact, **the library is the main driver and supporter of digital humanities use on most college campuses**, proving the library's value in strengthening its institution's mission.

These conclusions come from a study involving nearly 200 academic librarians from around the world, conducted in June and July 2019 by Library Journal in conjunction with Gale, a Cengage company. Highlights from the survey are detailed in this report.

The survey reveals that digital humanities use is enhancing teaching and scholarship at a majority of higher-education institutions. For instance, the use of textual analysis tools is bringing new insights to the study of literary works, and GIS mapping tools are helping students and scholars deepen their understanding of historical trends and periods.

Despite the inroads institutions are making, **there is a significant gap in the use of digital humanities between large research universities and smaller colleges**. This suggests a key opportunity for academic libraries at institutions with fewer students to assume a leadership position in bringing these capabilities to their campuses.

Lack of expertise among faculty is one of the top reasons cited for why colleges and universities don't currently offer digital humanities capabilities, and librarians can help solve this challenge by building the capacity of faculty to use these tools. Cost is also a factor, suggesting a need for cost-effective tools that remove barriers to digital scholarship.

# USE AND IMPACT OF DIGITAL HUMANITIES IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Although only a small majority (54 percent) of colleges and universities currently offer digital humanities capabilities, another 20 percent plan to add these capabilities or are in the process of doing so. Institutions that currently offer them have found that these tools and methods are making humanities topics more accessible to a wider range of people.

## DIGITAL HUMANITIES USAGE

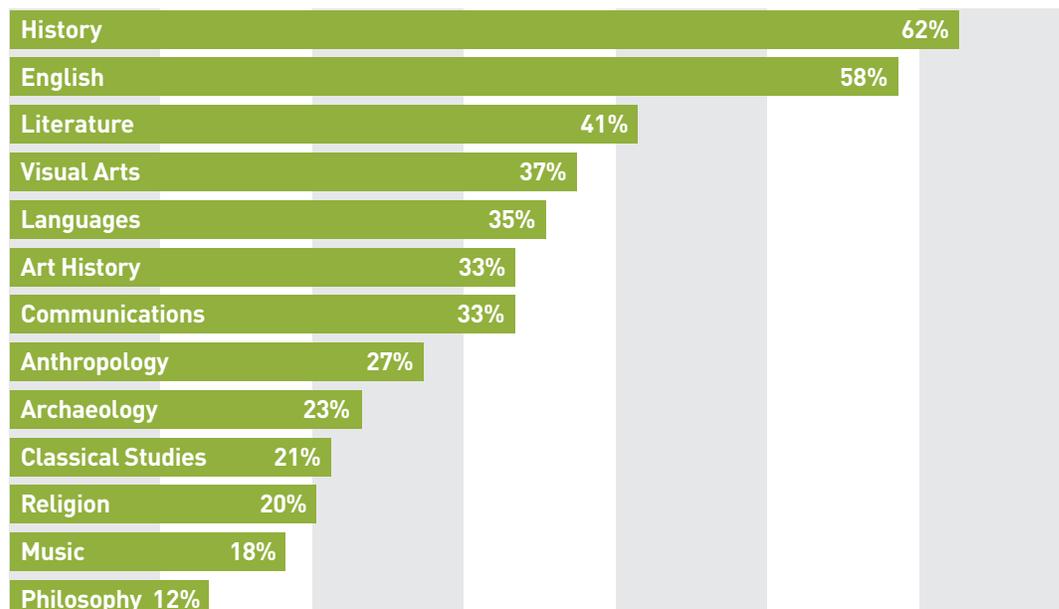
According to the survey, the most common digital humanities technologies in use today are GIS mapping (used by 42 percent of institutions), data visualizations (35 percent), and text mining (33 percent).

The survey suggests that institutions on the leading edge of technology use are more likely to incorporate digital humanities tools into their programs. Across the entire survey, about 5 percent of respondents described the culture of their institution as a technology “innovator,” and another 14 percent said they are “early adopters.” These percentages are slightly higher among institutions with digital humanities capabilities—and they rise dramatically among institutions that have a digital humanities center within the library.

Although digital humanities is frequently used as a teaching tool, it is rarely offered as a separate field of study, especially at smaller institutions. Only a third of colleges and universities offer digital humanities as an individual course or as elective credit toward another major. Fourteen percent offer it as a bachelor’s degree minor, 8 percent as a master’s degree, and only 6 percent offer it as a bachelor’s degree major.

Students are most likely to encounter digital humanities capabilities in 200-level classes and above. Only about a quarter of institutions currently bring these capabilities into 100-level or seminar classes.

## THE DEPARTMENTS THAT ENGAGE WITH DIGITAL HUMANITIES THE MOST ARE HISTORY AND ENGLISH, FOLLOWED BY LITERATURE AND THE VISUAL ARTS



## IMPACT ON LEARNING AND SCHOLARSHIP

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Survey respondents described a number of innovative ways in which faculty at their institutions are using digital humanities to enhance teaching and research. These tools and methods are engaging more students in the study of humanities, while expanding students' content knowledge **and** their digital acumen.

At the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), a collaborative project called "March on Milwaukee" has digitized historical artifacts from the city's struggle for civil rights. Interactive maps, timelines, and other digital tools add valuable context that enriches students' understanding of the topic. The project has had a "profound impact" on the teaching of public history, says Ann Hanlon, head of digital collections for UWM Libraries.

Digital humanities capabilities help bring abstract concepts to life for students, explains Wendy Kurtz, a digital humanities specialist at Gale who teaches in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). "Students are able to experience content tactilely and visually with the help of digital humanities tools," she says.

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**"Students are able to experience content tactilely and visually with the help of digital humanities tools."**

**WENDY KURTZ, DIGITAL HUMANITIES SPECIALIST, GALE, A CENGAGE COMPANY**

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Besides aiding in understanding, these tools empower both researchers and students to express their knowledge in new and exciting ways.

Many faculty who consult with the Digital Humanities Lab at UWM incorporate multimodal assignments into their courses, such as having students create their own podcasts. "Students are able to see themselves as producers of knowledge instead of just consumers," Hanlon says.

**Involving students in the creation of digital humanities artifacts has many benefits, respondents noted. Here are some of the examples they cited:**

- 1 "It has given students new research experiences that have changed their career plans."
- 2 "It has increased students' confidence in using technology."
- 3 "It has led students to try new things and expand their range of skills as well as learning critical thinking around technology."

Sarah Ketchley, another digital humanities specialist for Gale who teaches an Introduction to Digital Humanities course at the University of Washington, says digital humanities helps engage a broader range of students in the study of humanities.

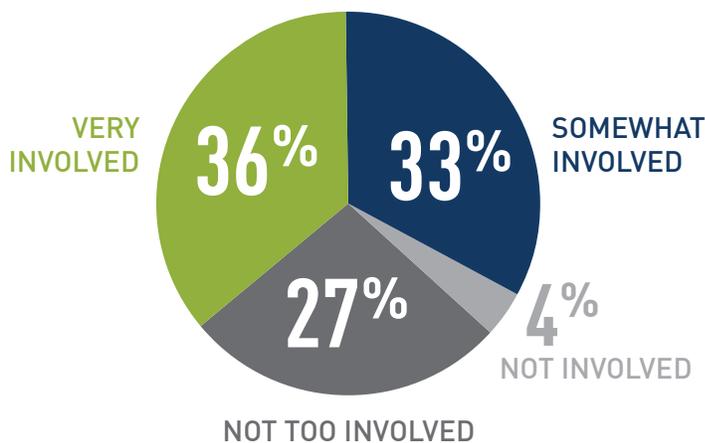
"I have students from both science and humanities backgrounds in my class," she observes. "For instance, I have computer science students who are interested in doing a computational analysis of humanities texts. Digital humanities as a field of study has broken down barriers around the world."

# THE LIBRARY'S ROLE IN DRIVING DIGITAL HUMANITIES CAPABILITIES

The library is a leader in aiding and improving digital humanities use on campus. Three-quarters of academic libraries offer ad hoc services that support digital humanities projects, the survey reveals—and a quarter of institutions have a digital humanities center located within the library. Helping students and faculty use digital humanities tools and capabilities is a significant way that librarians are demonstrating value to their institutions.

Virtually all survey respondents—99 percent—believe the library should play a role in supporting digital humanities, most commonly as a “full-fledged project collaborator and participant.” This is already happening at many institutions: When asked how involved their libraries are in supporting digital humanities use on campus today, 36 percent said “very involved” and 33 percent said “somewhat involved.” Only 4 percent aren’t involved in their institution’s digital humanities initiatives.

## LIBRARIES' CURRENT INVOLVEMENT



Librarians are building awareness of digital humanities capabilities on their campus. They’re helping faculty and students with research using digital humanities tools. And they’re bringing together researchers from different departments to share ideas.

Sixty-five percent of academic libraries help scholars plan for digital preservation needs. Sixty percent advocate for digital humanities support across their institution; 54 percent advise digital humanities scholars at the beginning of projects; and 32 percent co-sponsor grant applications.

The most common sources of funding for these initiatives are the library’s operating budget (62 percent) and/or grants (42 percent). The smallest institutions are especially reliant on grants. Internationally, grants are less common, and more funding comes from individual departments or the library/information technology (IT) budget.

## SURVEY RESULTS AT A GLANCE



BELIEVE LIBRARIES SHOULD SUPPORT DIGITAL HUMANITIES



HELP SCHOLARS PLAN FOR DIGITAL PRESERVATION



ADVOCATE FOR DIGITAL HUMANITIES



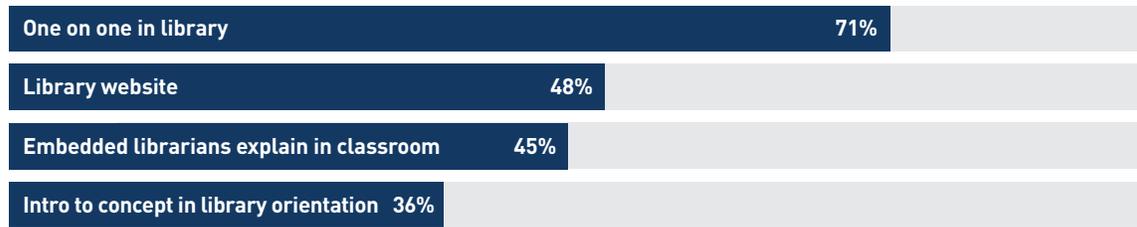
ADVISE DIGITAL HUMANITIES SCHOLARS

## STUDENT SUPPORT

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Academic libraries use a variety of methods to teach students about digital humanities, such as providing one-on-one support in the library and having embedded librarians expose students to the use of these tools within classes. These efforts are affecting how students interact with the library in positive ways, the survey reveals.

### HOW DOES YOUR LIBRARY TEACH STUDENTS ABOUT DIGITAL HUMANITIES?



Teaching students about digital humanities has resulted in “significant” increases in the use of library archives, databases, and other materials for 13 percent of respondents. Sixteen percent of librarians have observed “significant” increases in student excitement about doing research, and 8 percent believe digital humanities instruction has resulted in new usage by students who didn’t use the library before.

“The new Digital Humanities Lab has helped students see the library as a space to work on digital projects and the librarians as useful resources when they need help using technology.”

**CASEY LOWRY, ELECTRONIC RESOURCES SPECIALIST, EAST CENTRAL UNIVERSITY**

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At East Central University in Oklahoma, the addition of a Digital Humanities Lab in the library has resulted in what Electronic Resources Specialist Casey Lowry describes as a “moderate” increase in students’ engagement with the library and in their use of library databases. However, it has also shifted the way students view the library and its services.

“The new Digital Humanities Lab has helped students see the library as a space to work on digital projects and the librarians as useful resources when they need help using technology,” she says.

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

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**Libraries that host a digital humanities center appear to be well positioned in leading the use of these tools on campus—and they're also reaping other benefits.**

While 28 percent of all colleges and universities that were surveyed have a digital humanities center located in the library, this percentage rises to 44 percent among midsize institutions. Of those that do, 11 percent say having the center inside the library has increased library use significantly.

Using a 10-point scale, the survey asked librarians to rate the effectiveness of their digital humanities programs and services. Twenty-five percent of respondents gave a bottom three answer (1, 2, or 3) and 19 percent gave a top three answer (8, 9, or 10). However, the effectiveness rating was highest among institutions with a digital humanities center hosted within the library.

Thirty-nine percent of librarians believe it's important (rated 8, 9, or 10) to acquire unique digital tools and collections to support the use of digital humanities at their institution—and this figure rises to 49 percent of Association of Research Libraries (ARL) members.

Another strategy that seems effective is offering a scholarship or stipend to promote the use of digital humanities. Ten percent of libraries overall—and 19 percent of libraries that host a digital humanities center—say they do this, including UWM.

"We have a Digital Humanities Teaching Fellow program that's fairly new," Hanlon says. "It's an incentive program with a \$500 stipend that faculty can use for supplies and expenses, and it's awarded to faculty who are planning to use some kind of digital humanities tool or method. They come together as a cohort a few times during the fall semester to share what they're doing with each other, which is helpful, and then in the spring semester they create documentation and engage in a panel discussion about their experience."

Hanlon rated her library's support of digital humanities as a 9 out of 10, and she credits much of this success to cultivating partnerships. For instance, the library has partnered with the Office of Research, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and other departments to promote the use of digital humanities across campus. "It's about relationship building," she says.

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### ACQUIRE UNIQUE DIGITAL TOOLS



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### OFFER A STIPEND



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### CULTIVATE PARTNERSHIPS



## OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO DIGITAL HUMANITIES USE

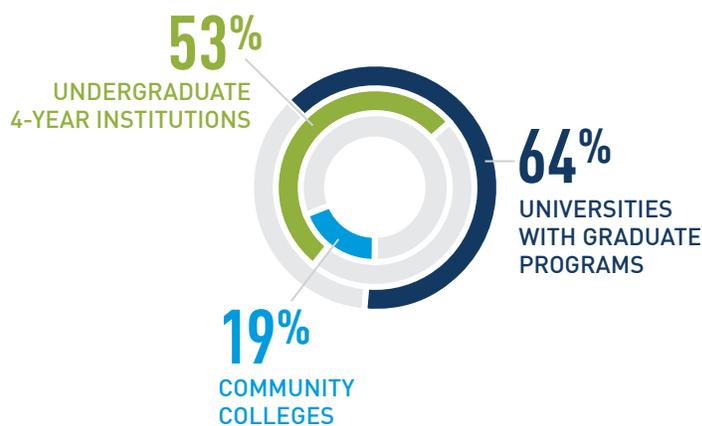
While the use of digital humanities is having a big impact on teaching and scholarship, 46 percent of survey respondents said their institution doesn't currently have digital humanities capabilities. There is a significant opportunity for libraries to help close this gap, but librarians must be creative and resourceful in how they approach the challenge.

The size of an institution is a key factor: More than 80 percent of institutions with at least 15,000 students have digital humanities capabilities, compared to just 37 percent of schools with fewer than 5,000 students.

### SIZE OF INSTITUTIONS WITH DIGITAL HUMANITIES



### LIKELY TO OFFER DIGITAL HUMANITIES



Universities with graduate-level programs (64 percent) are more likely to offer digital humanities than undergraduate four-year institutions (53 percent) and community colleges (19 percent). In other comparisons, public schools are slightly more likely than private institutions, and U.S. schools are more likely than international schools to use digital humanities methodologies.

Exactly half of institutions that don't currently offer digital humanities support said they would like to but don't have plans at this time. Four percent are in the process of adding digital humanities offerings, and 16 percent are making plans to do so.

**Not surprisingly, cost is the biggest barrier to entry, followed by a lack of expertise among faculty.**

## LEVERAGING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

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East Central University's experience is typical of many smaller institutions. At this public university with fewer than 4,000 students, the use of digital humanities "is still very new," Lowry says.

The university added a Digital Humanities Lab to its library in fall 2018 with the help of a grant, but the funding did not include money to hire any dedicated digital humanities staff. Lowry oversees the lab in addition to her primary responsibilities, which include managing all electronic resources and interlibrary loans.

"Ideally, the Digital Humanities Lab would have come with a new staff position that could focus on building digital humanities efforts across campus, but this did not happen," she says.

Despite this challenge, Lowry expects that faculty skills will grow significantly over the next few years as the liaison librarians who work with the university's academic departments encourage and support digital humanities use.

"I believe the liaison librarians can help increase the presence of digital humanities through direct communication with faculty," she says. "I hosted multiple training sessions this summer with all of the librarians to familiarize them with how our digital humanities equipment works, and we will be creating a communication plan over the next year that will help librarians spread ideas and information about the possibilities of digital humanities for teaching and research."

### USE WHAT YOU'VE GOT

Kurtz has seen the difference in capacity between large research universities and smaller institutions firsthand. She earned her undergraduate degree at a small liberal arts college that did not have a well-developed infrastructure for supporting digital humanities. After graduating, she worked at the Center for Digital Humanities at UCLA, which collaborated with separate librarians focusing on GIS use, metadata, and other specialties.

"It would be much more rare to find a GIS librarian at a smaller institution," she notes.

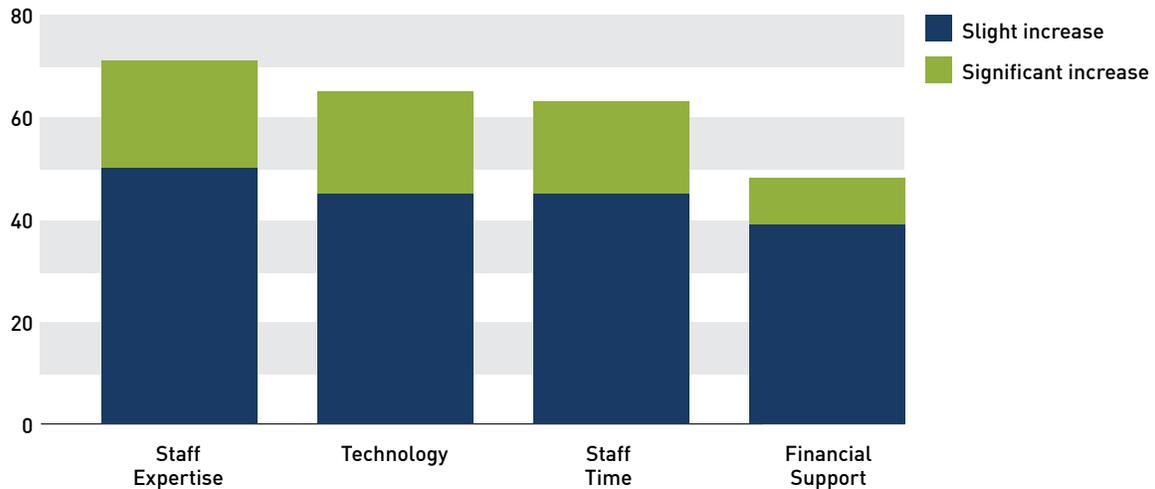
At smaller colleges and universities, libraries must make judicious use of the resources available to them. Librarians can also advocate for more resources by convincing leaders of the importance of digital humanities. "Framing it as a professional need is key," Kurtz says.

Investing in tools that make it easier to use digital humanities can help as well. For instance, many faculty members lack the technical skills needed to take advantage of digital humanities capabilities. A platform like the *Gale Digital Scholar Lab*, which Kurtz helped develop, addresses this challenge.

"It walks you through the process of creating a text mining and visualization project, so you don't have to be an expert in these processes," she says. "This helps break down the barriers to learning digital humanities methods."

## LOOKING AHEAD

Despite challenges, a clear majority of survey respondents expect their library's support of digital humanities to increase in the next year.



"Digital humanities expands the audience our research engages," Ketchley concludes, "and libraries play a valuable role in bringing people together and expanding their capacity to use these tools."

### ABOUT THE SURVEY

This report is based on responses from 189 librarians from around the world to a 37-question survey emailed on June 20, 2019. The survey was developed in conjunction with Gale, a Cengage company. Data were collected and tabulated by the *Library Journal* Research Division. The data are unweighted.

For the purposes of this survey, digital humanities refers to the application and/or development of digital tools and resources that enable researchers to perform new types of analyses in the humanities disciplines, such as literature, history, and philosophy.

Respondents consisted of libraries from graduate/professional institutions (46 percent), undergraduate four-year colleges or universities (38 percent), and community colleges (11 percent). Seventy-four percent of the responding institutions are located in the United States, and 26 percent are international. Nearly 59 percent of the responding institutions are publicly funded.

The most common job titles of those responding to the survey were reference librarian (19 percent), library director (15 percent), and head librarian (13 percent).

## GALE DIGITAL SCHOLAR LAB

## OPEN NEW RESEARCH PATHWAYS



The *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* helps bridge the gap that often exists between primary resources available in the library and the research needs and workflows of faculty and students. As an extension of *Gale Primary Sources* collections, this platform will encourage researchers and students to use their library's archival holdings for broader research needs.

### USE AND IMPACT

The *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* allows colleges and universities to easily launch, enhance, or accelerate their digital scholarship programs. By integrating primary source content with this powerful digital humanities tool, researchers are provided a new lens through which to explore history, empowering them to generate world-altering conclusions and outcomes.

### THE LIBRARY'S ROLE

As expert content curators and skilled technologists, librarians are natural collaborators throughout this process. Libraries around the world are embracing the opportunity to help faculty and students navigate ground-breaking research methodologies and achieve new outcomes. While funding for humanities resources is increasingly limited, digital humanities initiatives typically garner more support than traditional programs, positioning libraries well to actively engage at every step of the process.

### OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Finding, cleaning, and organizing data for analysis is a key consideration in the process of text mining that is necessary to generate meaningful results. The *Gale Digital Scholar Lab* removes these barriers and streamlines the workflow process, allowing researchers to spend more time identifying previously undiscovered data, testing theories, analyzing results, and gaining new insights.

## ABOUT GALE, A CENGAGE COMPANY

Gale, a Cengage company, partners with librarians and educators to create positive change and outcomes for researchers and learners. Gale empowers libraries to be active collaborators in the success of their institutions and communities by providing essential content that leads to discovery and knowledge, and user-friendly technology that delivers engaging learning experiences. Gale has close to 500 employees globally, with headquarters in Farmington Hills, Michigan. For more information, please visit [gale.com/academic](http://gale.com/academic).

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Learn more about supporting digital humanities on campus  
at [gale.com/dh-in-action](http://gale.com/dh-in-action)