

SoTL Conference Presentation: Dr. Judith McDaniel

Presentation session—45 minutes

Track: Academic/Professional Development

Title: Best practices for entering the digital humanities academic community: engaging and training faculty.

Session Objective: To untangle the threads of resistance to adopting and using an online learning experience.

Open—how many teach? How many teach online? What disciplines?  
How many are familiar with the field of digital humanities?

Slide 2:

Digital humanities--as it is currently being defined--is broadly humanities-based—and it includes academic and creative work in history, sociology, economics, political science, literature, music, performance studies—any contemporary field that can benefit from using computing technologies to extend traditional sources of knowledge. Research has shown that, as growth in online education in the United States has been profound and accelerating in the last ten years, the same phenomenon is true world-wide. China and India, for example, have placed a tremendous emphasis on online education to meet the needs of a large population of students and a limited physical infrastructure for universities. European countries like Ireland are considering online education to meet the needs of rural students.

Slide 3:

But digital humanities is about much more than online education. In 2010 Kathleen Fitzpatrick defined digital humanities as a “nexus of fields within which scholars use computing technologies to investigate the kinds of questions that are traditional to the humanities. 2010 Digital Humanities Conference

My focus here: What does this mean to me as a professor of literature and a professor of political science? What does it have to do with my research? With my teaching? And most importantly, how is it relevant to bringing more faculty into online teaching and learning?

Slide 4:

Farhad Saba (2005) defined three distinct cultures coexisting in higher education, which are based on different value structures and therefore have different norms and operational methods. “They are: the pre-modern culture of the faculty; the modern culture of the administration; and the post-modern culture afforded to distance educators by the application of information technology to teaching and learning” (p. 268).

Whether we agree with these labels or not, I believe this breakdown reflects significant differences in types of investment of those providing online education. And therefore, it is a partial explanation of some of the disconnection between humanities faculty and a willingness to embrace the digital humanities. It is an accepted fact that administrators in higher education have recognized—and are acting upon. In order to succeed in a world of diminishing public financing for higher education—indeed for education, period, a business model must make use of the tools of technology, including the internet.

Our goal is to bring faculty from wherever they are now into that post-modern world that embraces the use of technology to expand learning. And that learning can be about learning for online teaching, or learning for enhancing research methods, or for how to disseminate that research to a wider audience.

Slide 5:

One statistic that speaks to this is offered in the 2015 Babson/Online Learning Consortium report. For every year since they began this research in 2003, the number of students taking at least one online course has grown at a rate greater than that of the overall higher education student body. For three of these years (2003, 2005, and 2009) the growth topped 20%. The rate for the last four years has been moderate and the rate (not the number of students) has dropped slightly since 2009.

Slide 6:

The other statistic or fact that is relevant is how faculty themselves view online education—its effectiveness, its place in a university, and faculty willingness to teach online. In 2014 26% of faculty agree or strongly agree that online courses can achieve outcomes at least equivalent to in person courses. As you can see, this figure has been basically unchanged since the first survey by Inside Higher Ed in 2002.

Slide 7:

So while the faculty willing to provide online education has remained remarkably stable, the number of students enrolled in online education classes continues to grow. More than 6.7 million students—32 percent of total higher education enrollment—took at least one online course through a university during fall 2011, up from roughly 6.1 million students the year prior."

And the number of students who will take online courses is growing at the same time that overall student enrollment in higher education is declining.

Slide 8:

Here is how the media reported these extensive survey results. Faculty support for online education fell to its lowest level since 2005, just as enrollment in online college courses hit an all-time high.

Do we have a problem here? The percentage of students taking online courses is increasing even as fewer students are enrolling in higher education. And the attitude of

faculty who teach these students continues to be predominantly one of negativity or neutrality.

Slide 9:

So what IS the problem? I would suggest that we are quickly running out of time to reverse that flat or declining line of faculty approval about online education...

Slide 10:

Before we end up seriously out of control.

In an early study in 2003, Dr. Angie Parker asked: what would motivate faculty to teach online—what intrinsic and extrinsic factors might make a difference to an individual's willingness to try teaching online. Her respondents indicated that the same things that led them to teach in a classroom would also be incentives for online teaching--self-satisfaction, flexible scheduling and wider audience were the intrinsic rewards and stipends, decreased workload, release time and new technology were the extrinsic motivators.

Today--this seems silly to me. Resistance to technology is far more ingrained than a little release time or extra pay can overcome. I have had colleagues who retired rather than teach an online course. And one colleague who was not near retirement allowed herself to be "rified" rather than move to an online format. In my political science department today, a significant number of professors don't use a basic course site for grading, refuse to allow mobile devices of any description in the classroom.

Slide 11:

Five years later, Taylor and McQuiggan conducted a survey among faculty at Penn State University to determine what faculty want and need to be successful at online teaching. Their research question specifically asked: "What barriers inhibit faculty from participating in professional development experiences related to teaching online?"

The barrier cited most frequently was the time commitment needed to engage in faculty development courses followed by **a lack of recognition toward promotion and tenure**. Taylor and McQuiggan found that although faculty questioned the efficacy of online learning, they did so with a desire to understand the teaching environment and to learn how to make better decisions about selecting technology that would achieve learning goals.

Slide 12:

To summarize briefly--after nearly twenty years of research in distance/online education, we know that for online education to be a benefit to university and college students, two things are probably needed--that the faculty who will teach the courses are in favor of online education and that they have been trained in its delivery.

But beyond the panacea of time off and more remuneration, do we know yet HOW to create that favorable attitude? Are there no other “incentives” that drive an inquiring mind, a creative researcher, to explore online education?

And how is this connected to our discussion of digital humanities? “Knowing more” about online learning and “knowing more” about the pedagogy and technology of online learning must include an understanding of how learning interacts with digital humanities.

Slide 13:

Let me return to the issue of three cultures that I mentioned a few slides ago... the pre-modern culture of the faculty; the modern culture of the administration; and the post-modern culture afforded to distance educators by the application of information technology to teaching and learning. Those categories are interesting and perhaps helpful in thinking about strategic motivations of different academic groups. But I believe we must first recognize that scholars and artists generally understand little about the technologies that are so rapidly transforming their fields, while technology specialists have scant or no training in the humanities or the traditional arts.

What will surmount those barriers?

Slide 14:

I have recently been involved in discussions with university faculty and administrators in Ireland who have been told that they need to begin to put some of their curriculum online. The dean with whom I was speaking admitted that she knew nothing about how to go about that, nor did her faculty. Many of the faculty did not want to make this transition. We talked about the kind of training that might be useful, both technical and pedagogical. The technology piece was easy to consider. Teaching people how to use a learning management platform is not hard, but it is time-consuming. Understanding how to keep effective learning outcomes for a course while moving it from the classroom to an online platform—that is much more difficult. But the most daunting task was something quite different. Why should faculty WANT to put Celtic Studies courses into an online format? It is there, we agreed, that we must start.

I began to look at the process that brought me into an interest in what we could learn online—which is different from taking an online course. I was teaching in a B.A. program for Vermont College—a wonderful and innovative program that allowed students to attend classes for 10 days twice a year and meet with their instructors and then go home and do the studies and research that they had agreed on. Monthly packets confirmed their progress. One of my students was fascinated by and wanted to study the Shinto religion as it is still practiced today in Japan. I had taught several religion general education courses at the University of Arizona and so I was the instructor to whom this student was assigned.

Slide: 15:

She began with traditional steps—her local library. She found the usual resources—not text books, but a few scholarly studies of Eastern religions with a mention of Shinto. Her

first two packets came and they were nothing very remarkable. And then she went online. Today there are about ten sites where a student can learn about Shinto and the rituals that accompany this non-theist religion. In 2003, there was only one.

Slide 16: Website

Professor Ellen Schattschneider from Brandeis had just published a book on Shinto after years of research. The book was not available to my student, but Dr. Schattschneider had also created a website. She had spent years studying a community of practice and needed a much more robust vehicle for disseminating the results of her work.

Slide 17: Mieido Shrine and Altar

Slide 18: Akura Mountain Shrine

Slide 19: Ritual—Mountain Opening

This student walked through sacred shrines, she observed ancient rituals—she was transformed as a scholar by what she was finding.

The scholar who was not satisfied with publishing a scholarly book had stepped into the world of digital humanities. And my student followed her there. And I followed my student.

Slide 20:

Will the motivation for the Celtic Studies faculty to step into that world be the same as for the Religious Studies Professor? While college and university faculties have many things in common, there are also cultural markers that set them apart, just as there are cultural differences among the academic disciplines. Determining which of those cultural predispositions hinder or help faculty to be interested in or excited by the opportunities of online research and education is crucial to developing a training for faculty that is relevant and useful. Determining which reluctances are primary among a specific faculty will allow a curriculum that begins by addressing those areas.

Slide 21:

What are cultural markers and how do they function in academic disciplines? The definition I am using is this: Cultural markers are events or facets of our discipline that illustrate or reveal cultural or disciplinary norms, and shifts in those norms.

Slide 22:

One facet is the language with which we communicate in our disciplines.

For example: I took time off from college teaching for several years during the late eighties into the early nineties. When I returned to my discipline, literature, in which I had been teaching, I felt like I had been asleep for 50 years—a veritable Rip Van Winkle syndrome. No one spoke the language we had shared when I left academia. I was surrounded by colleagues who spoke—not about myth and archetype, close readings of literature, feminist criticism—but about Foucault and Derrida and deconstruction and the

performance of gender. The cultural language—marker, if you will—that had helped us communicate about our work had changed significantly.

Slide 23:

Assessment criteria are another cultural marker of an academic discipline. “Disciplines not only have signature [languages and] pedagogies, they also have signature assessments, and the skill of grading those is often handed down from generation to generation as an artisan craft. This is understood across the community of the discipline,” so faculty have no problem validating the marks assigned in their discipline by other professors.

Other examples?

Slide 24:

How would you begin a training for your faculty if you hoped to lead them into a postmodern world? What would be the first thing you would have to know about them?

You would need to know what their experience of technology is at this point.

Dariah-EU (Digital Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities)  
Do these questions reveal a cultural structure?

Slide 25:

What are the cultural markers here?

Slide 26:

And here?

What would an outstanding faculty development opportunity contain?

Demonstrate demonstrate demonstrate...

Make them WANT to join this community

- An interactive website in the appropriate field

- YouTube videos that expand experience

- An App that blends convenience and knowledge

- Technology that works and works smoothly

Slide 27:

As leaders in digital humanities, we are asking our students to leave accepted pathways and march into the desert; we have a responsibility to know enough to help them draw a new map.

Evaluating Digital Scholarship: Experiences in New Programmes at an Irish University, Cosgrave et al (2014).

Slide 28:

Final Questions.