Proposal to Faculty Senate
Washington State University

The Center for Digital Scholarship and Curation (CDSC)

Nature and Scope of the Center

Universities known nationally for their innovative research and programs around the creation of digital collections all have one thing in common: active, on-campus centers for digital research and production. These centers are physical spaces structured to provide research and technology support to students, faculty, and staff working across the university on digital projects, curricula, and products. Columbia University defines their center as a space where “users can come, individually or in groups, to identify, learn, and use the latest digital resources and technologies, often in combination with resources they create themselves or with resources and technologies acquired from other sites.” Working in a similar vein, we propose to create a Center for Digital Scholarship and Curation (CDSC) at Washington State University with a focus on standards and sustainable platforms to present cultural heritage online. The outcomes of this research will benefit multiple stakeholders including the WSU campus community, cultural heritage repositories, and indigenous communities at both the regional and national level.

Establishment of the CDSC will formalize long-term collaborations between faculty from the WSU Libraries and the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). The Libraries and CAS already have strong ties and existing partnerships based in digital scholarship, programming and curriculum development. When combined with the WSU Libraries’ wide array of collections, technical capacity, and expertise, CAS diverse faculty expertise and projects will create the foundation for unique contributions to digital scholarship. Expanding and formalizing these efforts into a Center for Digital Scholarship and Curation allows for richer collaborations not only with the existing Digital Technology and Culture (DTC) program in the English department, but also with faculty and students in history and fine arts, to name a few disciplines.

A prime example of collaboration between the Libraries and the College of Arts and Sciences is the work of Dr. Kimberly Christen Withey (CAS) and Alex Merrill (Libraries). Together these two faculty successfully received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to support the creation of digital tools, online training, and hands-on workshops highlighting the educational priorities of tribal archives, libraries and museums. Previously, the two worked with WSU faculty and staff in Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC), interns, graduate students and the Plateau Center for American Indian Studies to create and maintain the national award winning Plateau Peoples’ Web Portal. The Plateau Peoples’ Web Portal runs on the Mukurtu (MOOK-oo-too) content management system (CMS, a grassroots project aiming to empower local communities to manage, share and exchange their digital...
heritage in culturally relevant and ethically minded ways. This platform and the training involved in its application, including the management of collections and the development of digitization strategies, meets a need among Native American communities at a national level.

In addition to the research and development of Mukurtu, library faculty bring extensive experience in developing and sustaining digitized collections. With external support from individual donors, private foundations, and granting agencies, including the National Park Service, the NEH, the IMLS, and the Washington State Library (Library Services and Technology Act funds), librarians have created more than fifty digital collections containing more than 200,000 digital objects. One collection, the Early Washington Maps database, developed in partnership with the University of Washington Libraries and the Tacoma Public Library, provides access high-quality digitized versions of more than 1,000 rare, historical maps. Further collaborations between the librarians and CAS faculty include a digital repository of the work of Emerson and digital collections related to the Nez Perce Nation. Over the last decade, librarians also developed a stable, institutional repository for long-term digital preservation. Utilizing D-Space, an open source platform developed at MIT, the WSU Research Exchange (http://research.wsulibs.wsu.edu) includes electronic dissertations, WSU Showcase posters, Open Access-compliant versions of articles, and research data. As part of the center, one goal will be to increase the scope and range of Research Exchange collection including more WSU faculty publications. To provide the requisite technical infrastructure for the center, the library has invested in the necessary technology with internal funds, grants, and fund-raising efforts. For example, grants from the National Library of Medicine, LSTA, and NEH provided scanners and servers, while a major donor campaign raised $125,000 for the purchase of a Zeutschel, a specialized jumbo scanner, which creates high-resolution color scans of oversized materials up to three by four feet.

Together the Libraries and the College of Arts and Sciences propose the creation of the CDSC. The types of collaborations highlighted above testify to the existing enthusiasm, and support for this project across departments and provide the foundation for the central goal of the proposed CDSC at WSU: to foster the creation of digital tools, projects, public programming, and educational opportunities for the many publics the University serves.

More than just enabling faculty research and public service, however, the CDSC would also advance the core educational mission of the university, especially as it brings together faculty and students to pursue new opportunities for innovative learning. In this regard the proposed center has the particular support of both the Department of English and the multi-disciplinary Digital Technology and Culture (DTC). The DTC program serves undergraduates and is a hub for the creation of curriculum that could serve as a basis of the pedagogical and curricular outputs at the center. In addition to undergraduate resources such as intern programs—already in place between MASC and DTC and public history—we see the educational component of the CDSC as one that cuts a wide swath engaging faculty, students and the public.
The proposed CDSC will build on existing strengths. To set WSU apart nationally from other University digital centers, the CDSC will focus on meeting the unique digital challenges and needs of underserved populations, especially those WSU serves through its formal Memorandums of Understanding and through its vibrant Extension program. As a land grant University, WSU is in a key position in the state to develop public programming that incorporates computing, digital curation practices, and preservation services that go beyond one-off projects to the creation of tool sets. The Center for History and New Media (CHNH) at George Mason demonstrates that the creation of scholarly focused tools (Omeka and Zotero) is a key part of the success of Digital Humanities centers. The joint CAS and Library projects already funded by the NEH and IMLS to create digital tools, workflows and educational programming for Tribal archives, libraries and museums positions WSU’s proposed center as a national hub for digital scholarship emphasizing the needs of underserved Native American populations, the demand for ethical archival programming and the necessity of land grant universities to serve a wider public.

The founding a Center for Digital Scholarship and Curation at WSU is crucial to the national success and reputation of WSU and its programs and entities. This endeavor supports already existing efforts to increase interdisciplinary collaboration among the University. Current allocations of technology and facilities resources tend to reinforce rather than collapse disciplinary silos, with sophisticated equipment being allocated for narrowly defined research projects and located in secured (if not isolated) departmental labs. By contrast, the proposed CDSC will be situated in a publicly visible, central location on campus to provide a space for sharing ideas, resources and knowledge. Placing the Center in the Libraries would fulfill the goals regarding location, access and visibility campus wide.

The creation of this CDSC will initially rely on the faculty, staff and students already at WSU. During the 2013-2014 academic year CAS faculty met with several nationally recognized institutions and granting agencies to discuss funding structures and models for successful centers. After receiving advice from these meetings, we identified a physical space in the Libraries, created office space for the co-Directors from the Libraries and CAS, funded a developer (data specialist) position, and dedicated resources for public programming for the 2014-2016 academic years.

Over the next three years, the co-Directors will pursue partnerships with private companies, apply for national grants and pursue funding for post-doctoral positions.

Selection of the Directors and Colleges Involved

Two Co-Directors serving renewable three-year terms, one drawn from the Libraries and one from the CAS, will be selected by the Dean of Libraries and the Dean of CAS.

Expected Funding Needed

Much of the staffing for the CDSC will draw upon existing lines. Funding from the IMLS will support a temporary faculty librarian and a programmer for three years. At the end of the grant
period, the co-Directors will evaluate the need to retain these positions. The co-Director from CAS will have 12-month appointment with the summer salary paid from CAS (unless grant funds are available) and will be provided course releases enabling a teaching load during the appointment of one course per year. In the event these releases are not supported via grant funds, CAS will provide the home department with course buyout funds. CAS and the Libraries will each fund a graduate assistant.

Core Faculty

Trevor Bond, Libraries, Co-Director
Kim Christen Withey, English, Co-Director
Kristin Arola, English
Elizabeth Blakesley, Libraries
Alex Merrill, Libraries

Affiliated Faculty

Todd Butler, English
Mike Edwards, English
Leeann Hunter, English
Bill Condon, English
Patricia Ericson, English
Robert, McCoy History
Jeffrey Sanders, History
Clifford Stratton, History
Shannon Tushingham, Anthropology
Victor Villanueva, English

Needs for Space, Equipment and Supplies

The CDSC will be located in newly vacated space on the fourth floor of the Holland Library. The 12,500 square foot space includes a shared office for the co-Directors, a conference room, and areas for workstations, consultations, and workspaces for temporary faculty. Larger meeting rooms and a kitchen are also available on this floor. Classroom and other conference rooms in the Holland and Terrell Libraries will also be available for CDSC activities. The Libraries will reallocate existing technology and provide for the purchase of new hardware and software.

Expected Contributions to Instructional Programs

The CDSC will provide training and course materials for WSU faculty seeking to integrate digital scholarship and production into their courses. Digitization projects undertaken by the CDSC will provide online primary sources to support original research at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

The CDSC will work closely with the DTC program to provide internships, mentor students and provide hands on training for students pursuing digital scholarship. In addition, CDSC staff will
work with graduate Research Assistants from across the University and provide Graduate Assistantships for two students and with committed funding from the Libraries and CAS.

The CDSC will aid in the training and educational opportunities for the newly established new nine-credit graduate certificate in Digital Humanities and Culture administered by the English Department. The certificate emphasizes historical, rhetorical, and cultural knowledge by building expertise in the critical analysis and creative production of digital media. This understanding prepares students for problem solving and communicating both locally and globally. More than learning a specific technology or computing platform, a graduate certificate in Digital Humanities and Culture directs students to learn how, when, and most importantly why to use technology to solve a range of problems for digital classrooms, scholarly research methodologies, information technology companies, political advocacy groups, social justice projects and beyond. Merging theory and practice, the Digital Humanities and Culture certificate provides a foundation for critical digital literacy.

Expected Contributions to University and State

The CDSC will expand outreach to underrepresented communities, particularly the eleven signatory Native American Nations comprising WSU’s 1997 Memorandum of Understanding; provide new education opportunities across campus to faculty and students and develop new areas for faculty research and collaboration.

Together, as a part of the CDSC, faculty and staff from the CAS and the Libraries will collaborate with the Native American Programs office on campus and the Plateau Center for American Indian Studies to meet the specific needs articulated by the Native American Advisory board to make WSU research, collections and repositories accessible to tribal nations and promote access to and an engagement with tribal collections at WSU. At the state level, we will continue to develop collaborative projects already underway with faculty and curators at the University of Washington, Western Washington University, the Museum of Arts and Culture and the Burke Museum.