

Guidelines for the Evaluation of Digital Scholarship Across Disciplines

Joint Provost-Academic Senate University Research Committee, **April 25, 2013**

The Joint Provost-Academic Senate University Research Committee has spent the past three years surveying the impact of digital technologies on scholarly practice. In May 2012, the Committee approved a report on “The State of Digital Scholarship at the University of Southern California.” This report observed that, across the disciplines, new forms of scholarship have emerged that can only be conducted via digital technologies. Interactive, online, multi-modal (hypertext, video, audio, etc.), distributed, collaborative, geo-tagged, and virtual scholarship has become routine for many within the Academy. Scholarship in the digital age has already been transformed via the Internet, massive databases, new analytical tools, software innovation, mobile technologies, emerging forms of competency and literacy, and substantial changes in the publishing industry. Our committee is has been especially concerned with the manner in which emerging forms of scholarship might best be evaluated and assessed for tenure and promotion. The adoption of these new forms of scholarly practice could clash unhappily with standards and expectations that were developed long before such new modalities came into existence. Thus, we have worked with UCAPT to revise the language in the UCAPT manual and the Faculty Handbook regarding digital scholarship. This language explicitly recognizes emerging forms of scholarship, new kinds of scholarly productivity (such as the development of platforms, tools, and databases), and the increasingly collaborative nature of much of this research.

This document serves as an extension of this work, providing more explicit guidance in the evaluation of digital scholarship and serving as a resource for Departmental, School, and Unit level committees on promotion and tenure. The usual criteria of excellence, impact, and originality apply as well to digital scholarship across the disciplines. Faculty undertaking digital scholarship and research should be evaluated rigorously and fairly. These Guidelines draw heavily from several existing recommendations for the assessment of digital scholarship (see Appendix below), most notably those produced by the Modern Language Association.

Guidelines for Appointment, Tenure, and Promotion Committees.

Describe Expectations Clearly. When faculty members are hired in positions that will encompass digital scholarship and research, the candidate and the department should clearly specify expectations for research outputs and formats. Requirements for tenure or promotion relative to digital research should be delineated and documented, and the department or school should indicate how such work will be evaluated and assessed. Departments should recognize that much digital scholarship is collaborative, process oriented, and labor intensive and develop methods to account for these differences from text-based scholarship. The 2011 Academic Senate resolution on Academic Collaboration and Scholarly Attribution can be found [at this link](#), and the University Research Committee’s Recommendations on Collaboration and Scholarship at USC, approved by in 2010, can be found [at this link](#).

Review the Work Appropriately. Digital scholarship should be evaluated in the medium in which it is produced. Candidates should not be asked to print out work that is best assessed in its born-digital form, and reviewers should be provided appropriate information to undertake a fair assessment. Committees must also engage appropriate reviewers who are familiar with the specific area of digital scholarship in which the faculty member conducts research, as all digital scholarship is not the same. If the scholarship being evaluated is collaborative, care should be taken to follow UCAPT recommendations for the assessment of collaborative work. We also

note that nearly all scholarship today is produced in digital format, and therefore digital review should become the norm, while review by paper should become the exception.

Utilize Appropriate Criteria. Digital scholarship may require attention to different criteria than does text-based scholarship. Peer review for digital scholarship often occurs in advance of the project's creation in the grant funding stage or during project development. Particular technical standards may be relevant in assessment, as are elements of technical design and data management. Issues of aesthetic design and formal structure may also be considered. Value to or impact on the field and society might be determined by the potential for broad use and uptake, particularly in the case of databases or general-purpose tools.

Guidelines for Candidates for Promotion, Appointment or Tenure

Describe your work and its contributions. The impact, originality and contributions of digital scholarship may not be immediately clear to those outside of the field. Scholars undertaking digital scholarship will need to take care in documenting and explaining their research. Methods, impacts, theoretical contributions and recognition should be explicitly explained. The value of the digital components of the work to the field at large should be addressed. Elements of peer review and assessment should be made clear; for instance, was the work awarded competitive grant funding or otherwise assessed during its creation? The process and labor involved in the research should be described, particularly for projects involving infrastructure, datasets or tool building. Collaborations should be addressed with the roles of various team members explained while recognizing that some collaborations cannot be quantitatively teased apart. Scholars should also provide information on the necessary platforms and technologies needed for appropriate review of their work.

Appendix of Other Useful Guidelines for the Evaluation of Digital and/or Collaborative Research

Digital Scholarship in the Humanities and Arts

- Modern Language Association
- [Guidelines for Evaluating Work in Digital Humanities and Digital Media](#)
- Special issue of Profession on “[Evaluating Digital Scholarship](#)”
- UNL Center for Digital Research in the Humanities
- [Promotion & Tenure Criteria for Assessing Digital Research in the Humanities](#)
- UCLA Center for Digital Humanities
- [How To Evaluate Digital Scholarship](#)
- College Art Association
- [Guidelines for Faculty Teaching in New-Media Arts](#)
- American Association for History and Computing
- [Guidelines for Evaluating Digital Media Activities in Tenure, Review, and Promotion](#)
- *Leonardo* Journal/University of Maine
- [New Criteria for New Media](#)
- *Journal of Digital Humanities*
- Issue on [Evaluation](#)