## Digital Humanities at the University of Washington

As a collective autobiography of mankind, the humanities—history, literature, art, and philosophy—have historically played a leading civic role in society. But in recent decades, the academy's civic role has weakened: higher education increasingly has been seen as a private rather than a public good. The Simpson Center for the Humanities at the University of Washington seeks to reverse this trend by taking humanities scholarship public with the new digital technologies.

For nearly a decade, the Simpson Center has explored how humanities scholars can use digital technologies to transform the way they do research, teach, and share their knowledge. We are already innovating the ways we animate and circulate information, making it more engaging for students and accessible to the public.

For example, the *Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project* (www.depts.washington.edu/civilr/) is a multimedia website devoted to the many civil rights struggles in our region utilizing not only textual documents but also recorded oral histories and rare photographs. Among the many exciting aspects of this project, the website has developed an impressive international audience and the work has formed a basis for new curricula in the public schools.

In the case of *American Sabor: Latinos in U.S. Popular Music,* faculty and graduate students partnered with Seattle's Experience Music Project to bring new scholarship and learning opportunities into the museum setting. Through image galleries, maps and timelines, video presentations of oral histories, and listening modules that both educated and trained the ear, the bilingual exhibit explored Latino contributions to popular music in the United States—*sabor* literally means flavor or taste. Significant to its function as a digital humanities project, once the museum exhibit closed, the scholarship was archived not as a gallery book but as interactive installations and online curricula. Through a partnership with KEXP 90.3 FM Seattle, the *American Sabor* listening modules were transformed into a ten-part documentary series (www.kexp.org/learn/documentaries). Moreover, the exhibit is traveling to other cities and has inspired new curricula for Spanish, social studies, and music teachers. *American Sabor* was funded by a grant from the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation.

Humanities faculty have also discovered new strategies to utilize advanced technology in their research. *The Early Buddhist Manuscript Project*, for example, employs high quality digital scanning and imaging technologies to literally piece together broken fragments of 2,000-year-old manuscripts, revealing for the first time some of the earliest known written documentation of one of the world's most important religions.

**What's NEXT in the Digital Humanities?**

## What's NEXT in the Digital Humanities

Thanks to a recent Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Simpson Center will soon strengthen its position at the forefront of digital humanities efforts by creating a new kind of think-tank called the *Digital Humanities Commons*. The Digital Humanities Commons will position scholars to re-engage their civic role. Through it we will create new educational spaces, produce new collaborative scholarship and stories, and share these widely in the service of public reflection, feeling, and action.

It works like this: Each summer, four faculty members and four graduate students—all working in the humanities—will be chosen on the basis of competitive applications and brought to the Commons to explore how the NEXT generation of technology can change their research and teaching. In addition to supporting their research, the Commons will also fund their technical and artistic collaborators and buy equipment to help make their ideas a reality.

The Digital Humanities Commons has three primary goals:

1. to *animate* knowledge—not just to capture text online but also to use visual images, soundtracks, and interactive features that bring the humanities to life;
2. to *circulate* knowledge—not only to the academic community but also to the larger public audience that has always been a focus of Simpson Center programs;
3. to *understand* digital culture—not only its historical, social, and cross-cultural dimensions but also its potential to shape our understanding of ideas and people.

## You can help us get there

Receiving the National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant is a starting point, but we need the support of donors who value the humanities and civic role of the university and who understand the vital importance of the collaborative scholarship that the Digital Humanities Commons will encourage. The challenge grant is just that: a challenge. For every $3 in gifts we receive, the NEH will prove a $1 match up to $625,000. If we meet the challenge, we will endow the Digital Humanities Commons at $2,500,000 and support new directions in the humanities in perpetuity. Gifts in any amount will be matched, but three types allow donors to join their names to this endeavor:

*Endowed Faculty Fellowship:* A gift of $200,000 supports research, technical support, curriculum development, equipment purchases, or other professional expenses for a faculty member. Endowed faculty fellowships enhance the University's ability to recruit and retain outstanding faculty whose creativity and expertise enrich the intellectual life of the campus and community.

*Endowed Graduate Fellowship:* A gift of $100,000 supports an outstanding graduate student in the humanities. Many have grown up with digital technology in ways faculty members have not. They bring this experience and imagination to their scholarship and, as the next generation of scholars and teachers, truly will invent the future.

*"The Simpson Center will serve as a national model for the transformation of the traditional humanities centers in the digital age."*
Bruce Cole, Former NEH Chairman

*Endowed Fund:* A gift of $25,000 or more creates a named fund that can support any need within the Commons. These needs may include equipment costs, public programs, technical and artistic collaboration, or future needs that evolve as new technologies create new opportunities.

*To learn more about supporting the Digital Humanities Commons, contact Chris Landman, Director of Advancement for the Humanities, at 206.616.0632 or clandman@u.washington.edu.*