



A BIMONTHLY REPORT ON RESEARCH LIBRARY ISSUES AND ACTIONS FROM ARL, CNI, AND SPARC

ADVOCATING FOR DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT OF THE ACLS

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Editor's note: With support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) appointed a national Commission on Cyberinfrastructure in the Humanities and Social Sciences. During 2004, the commission carried out extensive research, hearings, and consultations to gather information and develop perspective. The final report, summarized in this article, was released in the fall of 2006.

Making the world's cultural heritage available to every citizen is the goal of the American Council of Learned Societies' (ACLS) Commission on Cyberinfrastructure in the Humanities and Social Sciences and the focus of its recent report *Our Cultural Commonwealth*.¹ The commission defined cyberinfrastructure broadly to denote:

...the layer of information, expertise, standards, policies, tools, and services that are shared broadly across communities of inquiry but developed for specific scholarly purposes: cyberinfrastructure is something more specific than the network itself, but it is something more general than a tool or a resource developed for a particular project, a range of projects, or, even more broadly, for a particular discipline.

So, for example, digital history collections and the collaborative environments in which to explore and analyze them from multiple disciplinary perspectives might be considered cyberinfrastructure, whereas fiber-optic cables and storage area networks or basic communication protocols would fall below the line for cyberinfrastructure.²

The report, in the words of its authors, is "primarily concerned...with institutional innovations that will allow digital scholarship to be cumulative, collaborative, and synergistic."³

Building on the findings of their investigation, the commission outlined the potential contributions of such an infrastructure, the distinct needs of the humanities and the social sciences in such a system, and recommended priorities for leadership and collaboration among public and private organizations, institutions, and individuals.

Intended for a large, varied audience, the report focuses on three areas of inquiry: the case for why the investment in cyberinfrastructure in the humanities and social sciences is needed; the challenges and barriers; and a framework for coordinated action.

Why Invest in Cyberinfrastructure?

One of the potential rewards of strengthening and coordinating the creation of a robust cyberinfrastructure is expanding areas of scholarly inquiry and increasing access to primary and secondary sources in a wide variety of formats. Through the use of new technologies, scholars have the opportunity to change the ways they see and use cultural artifacts, and work collaboratively with researchers in the US and around the globe. Equally important, the public will have greater access to the insights of scholarship and scholarly resources valuable for personal learning and teaching.

Challenges to Overcome

The barriers to making cultural heritage materials widely available digitally to scholars and the general public, according to the commission, are the characteristics of the data itself, current copyright law and public policy, the cultures of scholarship

and universities, the influence of commercial or any other market-based strategies that measure the value of scholarship in revenue from sales, and the lack of resources on the scale needed.

The commission focuses especially on the issues of scholarly communication in economic terms, declares that it supports open communication as a public good, and expresses its concern that the United States is significantly behind the European nations, Australia, and Canada in its support for cyberinfrastructure and research funding in general. Private funders, especially foundations, have played a key but disproportionate role in supporting digital humanities and social sciences initiatives.

New federal funding is crucial, not only for infrastructure, but also for projects that propose new ways to make digital efforts sustainable. The commission notes, "Received wisdom on the limits of the market for ideas has been radically reoriented by the rise of networked communities, and at this point, scholarly communication may well stand to lose more by failing to experiment than from experiments that fail."⁴

Framework for Collaborative Action

The commission begins its framework for action by outlining five characteristics for a trustworthy and effective cyberinfrastructure in the humanities and social sciences—accessible as a public good, sustainable, interoperable, facilitates collaboration, and supports experimentation.

In meeting its charge to recommend opportunities for collaborative action, the commission goes on to highlight eight priority areas in which effort and commitment on the part of a large group of stakeholders are vital:

- Federal and private funding agencies as well as universities need to invest as a strategic priority.
- Leaders in the humanities and social sciences from a variety of organizations and legislative bodies need to promote openness and access at local, institutional, and national levels.
- Private and public organizations, including commercial entities, must foster collaboration between the public and private sectors.
- Scholars, academic administrators, and funders should cultivate leadership support from within humanities and social sciences disciplines.

- Libraries, national endowments and other federal agencies, scholarly societies, and individuals need to encourage digital scholarship through a variety of strategies including fellowships, workshops, and support for individual projects.
- Universities, legislators at the national and state level, and funding bodies must establish national centers to support scholarship that takes advantage of cyberinfrastructure.
- Individuals and public and private organizations should develop and maintain open standards and effective tools.
- Scholars, librarians, and federal and private grant-giving agencies must create extensive digital

collections that will be widely available. The commission notes that scholars have a key role to play in the development of digital collections to ensure that they will be valuable in support of humanities and social sciences research and teaching.

Conclusion

The commission concludes their report by defining success as a greatly expanded audience for social sciences and humanities scholarship among the general public and new forms and methods of research that answer

new and exciting questions. Declaring that the sustainability of disciplines in humanities and social sciences is at risk, the commission calls on senior scholars and senior administrators in research universities to lead the way in the development of a robust cyberinfrastructure.

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The author of this summary is a member of the ARL Task Force on the ACLS Cyberinfrastructure Report, charged to review the report and identify opportunities for research libraries to advance the report's recommendations.

¹ *Our Cultural Commonwealth: The Report of the American Council of Learned Societies Commission on Cyberinfrastructure for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (New York: ACLS, 2006), <http://www.acls.org/cyberinfrastructure/OurCulturalCommonwealth.pdf>.

² *Ibid.*, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, i.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

POSSIBILITIES

Creating such an infrastructure is a grand challenge for the humanities and social sciences, and indeed for the academy, the nation, and the world, because a digitized cultural heritage is not limited by or contained within disciplinary boundaries, individual institutions, or national borders.

—*Our Cultural Commonwealth*, page 11

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINED EFFORT & COMMITMENT

In *Our Cultural Commonwealth*, the ACLS Commission on Cyberinfrastructure in the Humanities and Social Sciences recommends the following measures necessary to achieve the goals and meet the challenges described in the report:

1. Invest in cyberinfrastructure for the humanities and social sciences, as a matter of strategic priority.

Addressed to: Universities and colleges; federal and private funding agencies

2. Develop public and institutional policies that foster openness and access.

Addressed to: University presidents, boards of trustees, provosts, and counsels; university presses; funding agencies; libraries; scholarly societies; Congress

3. Promote cooperation between the public and private sectors.

Addressed to: Universities; federal and private funding agencies; Internet-oriented companies

4. Cultivate leadership in support of cyberinfrastructure from within the humanities and social sciences.

Addressed to: Senior scholars; scholarly societies; university administrators; senior research librarians and research library organizations; academic publishing organizations; federal funding agencies; private foundations

5. Encourage digital scholarship.

Addressed to: Universities and colleges; research libraries; the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH); the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA); the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS); the National Academies; the National Archives; major private foundations; major scholarly societies; individual leaders in the humanities and social sciences

6. Establish national centers to support scholarship that contributes to and exploits cyberinfrastructure.

Addressed to: Universities; Congress; state legislatures; public funding agencies; private foundations

7. Develop and maintain open standards and robust tools.

Addressed to: Funding agencies, public and private; scholars; librarians; curators; publishers; technologists

8. Create extensive and reusable digital collections.

Addressed to: The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), and other funding agencies, both public and private; scholars; research libraries and librarians; university presses; commercial publishers

—*Our Cultural Commonwealth*, pages 3–5

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE RELEASE OF THE ACLS REPORT

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Invest in Cyberinfrastructure (Recommendation 1)

NEH Digital Humanities Initiative
<http://www.neh.gov/grants/digitalhumanities.html>

Advancing Knowledge:
IMLS/NEH Digital Partnership
http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/Digital_Partnership.html

Foster Openness and Access (Recommendation 2)

Association of American University Presses,
“AAUP Statement on Open Access,” February 2007
<http://aaupnet.org/aboutup/issues/oa/statement.pdf>

Encourage Digital Scholarship (Recommendation 5)

ACLS Digital Innovation Fellowships
<http://www.acls.org/difguide.htm>

Diane Harley et al., “The Influence of Academic Values on Scholarly Publication and Communication Practices,” University of California, Berkeley, Center for Studies in Higher Education, September 2006
<http://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/docs/ROP.Harley.AcademicValues.13.06.pdf>

Modern Language Association (MLA) Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion, *MLA Report on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion*, December 2006
http://www.mla.org/tenure_promotion/

Hilary Ballon and Mariët Westermann, *Art History and Its Publications in the Electronic Age*, Rice University Press and Council on Library and Information Resources, September 2006.
<http://cnx.org/content/col10376/latest/>

Establish National Collaborative Centers (Recommendation 6)

The Council on Library and Information Resources is planning meetings to explore and make recommendations for national centers that support collaborative scholarship using cyberinfrastructure. Topics for discussion will include types of centers needed, their organization and governance, and their relation to activities in the US and abroad.
<http://www.clir.org/>

NEH/University of Maryland Summit Meeting of Digital Humanities Centers, April 12–13, 2007
<http://www.neh.gov/whoware/cio/centers/>

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