

DiSC: Developing a Digital Scholarship Commons



With the support of the Mellon Foundation, a team from Emory University's Woodruff Library spent the past year planning the development of a Digital Scholarship Commons. The ultimate goal is the creation of a transdisciplinary, collaborative digital scholarship center that is truly of the library, not simply in the library. We explored numerous existing models of digital scholarship centers, reviewed the relevant literature, convened an advisory board composed of experts in digital scholarship, and conducted extensive conversations with faculty members, graduate students, and librarians. Our goal was to discover what makes a digital humanities program vibrant, interdisciplinary, and financially sustainable; to determine how we can bring scholars from all disciplines into the library; to explore a hybrid organizational model for sustaining DiSC; to explore new ways of leveraging the library's collections; and to devise a plan to build librarians' skills so that they keep pace with the evolving research needs of the twenty-first century scholar.

Our investigations took us to five noted centers of digital scholarship in the United States: Duke University's Visual Studies Initiative (VSI); the University of Maryland's Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH); the Scholar's Lab (VSI) at the University of Virginia; George Mason University's Center for History and New Media (CHNM); and the University of Nebraska's Center for Digital Research in the Humanities (CDRH). These five institutions gave us an opportunity to see digital scholarship in action, to get a "feel" for the impact of physical space on a project such as the one we are undertaking, and to better understand the issues that face institutions once the realities of long-term budget and management arise.

The result of this preliminary phase is the creation of a new physical space called the Digital Scholarship Commons and nicknamed the DiSC. Housed in the main University Library building, it is shared conceptually and operationally with faculty, researchers, and Emory at large. The headline image shows the architect's conceptualization of the new DiSC space. The organization of the space and its potential uses were developed during a series of conversations over several months with Faculty, Staff, Librarians, and graduate Students at Emory.¹

The new DiSC space in the Library is being designed to facilitate scholarly collaboration, to take advantage of the resources and expertise available in the library, and to attract scholars from across the disciplines. We hope that it will provide insight for other institutions seeking to build their own transdisciplinary, library-based centers for digital scholarship.

¹ Design and drawings by Leo A. Daly architects of Atlanta.