

Background

Introduction

Arts and humanities computing has since its inception been hampered by the lack of an adequate means for collecting and publishing information about activity in the field. Its interdisciplinary scope and methodological nature, coupled with rapid changes in the technology and long undervalued contributions to scholarship, have so far thwarted the development of a practical bibliography of published and ongoing work. The lack of such a bibliography has been repeatedly and urgently noted by researchers, administrators and funding agencies, all of whom need to know what work is being done, by whom and where publications from it may be found. It seems clear from the brief attempt in the *Humanities Computing Yearbook* (Oxford University Press, 1988-90) that the medium of print is inadequate for the task. Current online publishing tools, however, would allow an accurate survey of arts and humanities computing to be maintained and distributed at very low cost: thus the International Database described here.

A preliminary attempt to construct such a Database was made at the Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities (Princeton and Rutgers), 1995-96, while Susan Hockey was Director. Earlier projects include Robert Kraft's compilation of e-text projects in the late 1980s, Georgetown's expansion of his legacy as the "Catalogue of Projects in Electronic Text from 1989-93," and Marianne Gaunt's early compilations accessible on the Research Libraries Information Network. To this should be added the "Directory of Scholars Active" printed in an early edition of the journal "Computers and the Humanities." That included information on the intellectual goals of digital projects. More recently the Council on Library and Information resources published a "[Digital Collections Inventory Report](#)," focusing on library conversion projects.

The idea for an actively maintained, international, collaborative database, with "deep data" on the projects, was one early offshoot of the "Computing and the Humanities Roundtable Meeting," organized in March 1997 by the National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage, the Coalition for Networked Information and the Computer Science and Telecommunications Board, National Research Council (U.S.). (For the published proceedings of that meeting, see Occasional Paper 41, American Council of Learned Societies) Subsequently a small group of prominent administrators and scholars in humanities computing (listed below) have begun work on a more ambitious prototype of the Database and have arranged for it to be developed and maintained by centres in Europe and North America.

Definition & Scope of the Project

The International Database is to contain peer-reviewed information on research and resource-building projects that make significant use of humanities computing methods. Projects that collect, encode, analyze or present source materials and those developing computing tools would be considered. Project websites would as a rule be used in documentation of projects, but the International Database aims to go far beyond the kind and depth of information usually available on the Web. It would not deal with electronic publishing as such, since there are already resources dedicated to tracking and cataloguing these.

Due diligence will be done to ensure that this project is not duplicating other work and due publicity will be given to ensure that others in the field know of the development of the project. One current, related project is a "Directory of ARL Digital Library Projects," conducted for the Association of Research Libraries by a team at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

Audience

The core audience for the Database would be working scholars, administrators, libraries and funding agencies. It would also aim to benefit scholars who are curious about the technology but unfamiliar with the kinds of work currently making good use of it.

Related Projects

Due diligence will be done to ensure that this project is not duplicating other work and due publicity will be given to ensure that others in the field know of the development of the project. One current, related effort is the "Directory of ARL Digital Library Projects," conducted for the Association of Research Libraries by a team at the University of Illinois, Chicago. Others include the nascent "Humanities Computing Repository" at Queens University, Canada and the "1993 "Survey of Humanities Computer-Based Projects" in UK universities commissioned by the Office for Humanities Communications.

Organization

The Database will be developed by a geographically distributed team. Initially, Rice University and the Office of Humanities Communication, King's College London, will be the lead US and European institutions. (The respective administrators from Rice and King's, Chuck Henry and Harold Short, have

expressed considerable optimism that the project will receive funding at their institutions and from other US and European sources.) An Editorial Board will shortly be created and a managing editor appointed.

Timeline

A group consisting chiefly of the participants listed below met during the Digital Resources for the Humanities conference in 1997 at Oxford, England, to finalize the overall concept and parameters for the project.

A prototype, based on the CETH model, using an SGML entry form and SGML editing, was assembled jointly by Rice University and the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Virginia. This early prototype was made available online for inspection and commentary by the team. After some discussion at a demonstration at Georgetown University, over whether to use SGML or a database model, it was decided that, despite the greater flexibility of SGML, and given the interoperability of most contemporary databases (using the ODBC standard), the ease of output from one to another and the ease of data input using web-based forms, a database structure was the better choice. Given the recommendation to go with a database structure, the group concluded that Dublin Core would be a good base to use, on to which necessary additional fields be added.