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Patricia Hswe, Program Officer
Scholarly Communications

Taking Stock of Technology Sustainability in the Humanities: A Funder's Perspective

CEAL 2020 Online Annual Meeting

Agenda for the talk

- Background about the Scholarly Communications program at Mellon
- Sampling of grants focused on Asian materials & other non-English content
- Technology / Infrastructure sustainability challenges
- It's not all gloomy!

But first: Thank you—

- Zhijia Chen and all the organizers of the meeting
- My colleagues, current and former, in the Scholarly Communications program
- Information Maintainers community - https://themaintainers.org/info-mc-about-us

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Two epigraphs

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"Let me make a forecast: In the next 50 years, the entirety of our inherited archive of cultural works will have to be re-edited within a network of digital storage, access, and dissemination."

— Jerome McGann (2002)

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"Two basic systems: Development and Maintenance. The sourball of every revolution: after the revolution, who's going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?"

— Mierle Laderman Ukeles

"Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!"

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About the Scholarly Communications program

Some context

- One of three program areas—the other two:
  - Higher Education and Scholarship in the Humanities
  - Arts and Cultural Heritage
- Also, Presidential Initiatives
- Process
  - Proposals are invited & 4 times
  - Board of Trustees approves or rejects

Note: Mellon funds in the arts and humanities.

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Extent of Scholarly Communications program grants

FEATURED Recent Grants MMUF Electronic Publishing Architecture, Urbanism, and the Humanities Plants Initia

https://mellon.org/grants/grants-database/

PROGRAM AMOUNT YEARS

Scholarly Communicat SUBMIT > Advanced Search

1,598 GRANTS

$742.77 MILLION AWARDED

Grant appropriations are displayed by the grantee's location.

Limit search to map boundaries

1,598 GRANTS AWARDED FOR $742,765,305

RESULTS PER PAGE: 25

GRANTEE	PROJECT	DATE	AMOUNT	LOCATION	PROGRAM

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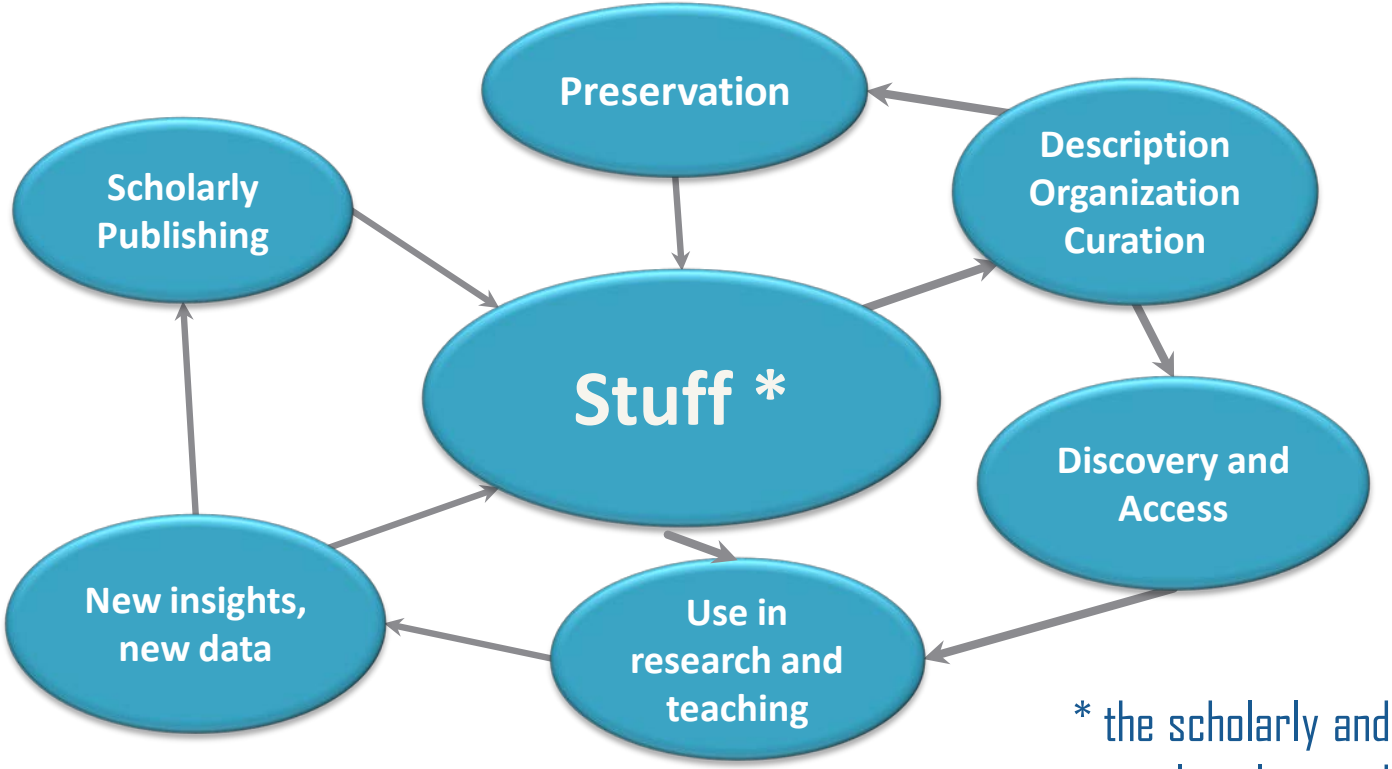
Mission Statement (excerpt)

The Scholarly Communications program assists research libraries, archives, museums, universities, presses, and arts organizations to realize the potential of digital technologies in furthering the collective understanding of societies and cultures around the world.

We care about the "stuff"



* the scholarly and cultural record

Diagram by Helen Cullyer and Tasha Garcia

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A Digital Research Workflow for the Humanities

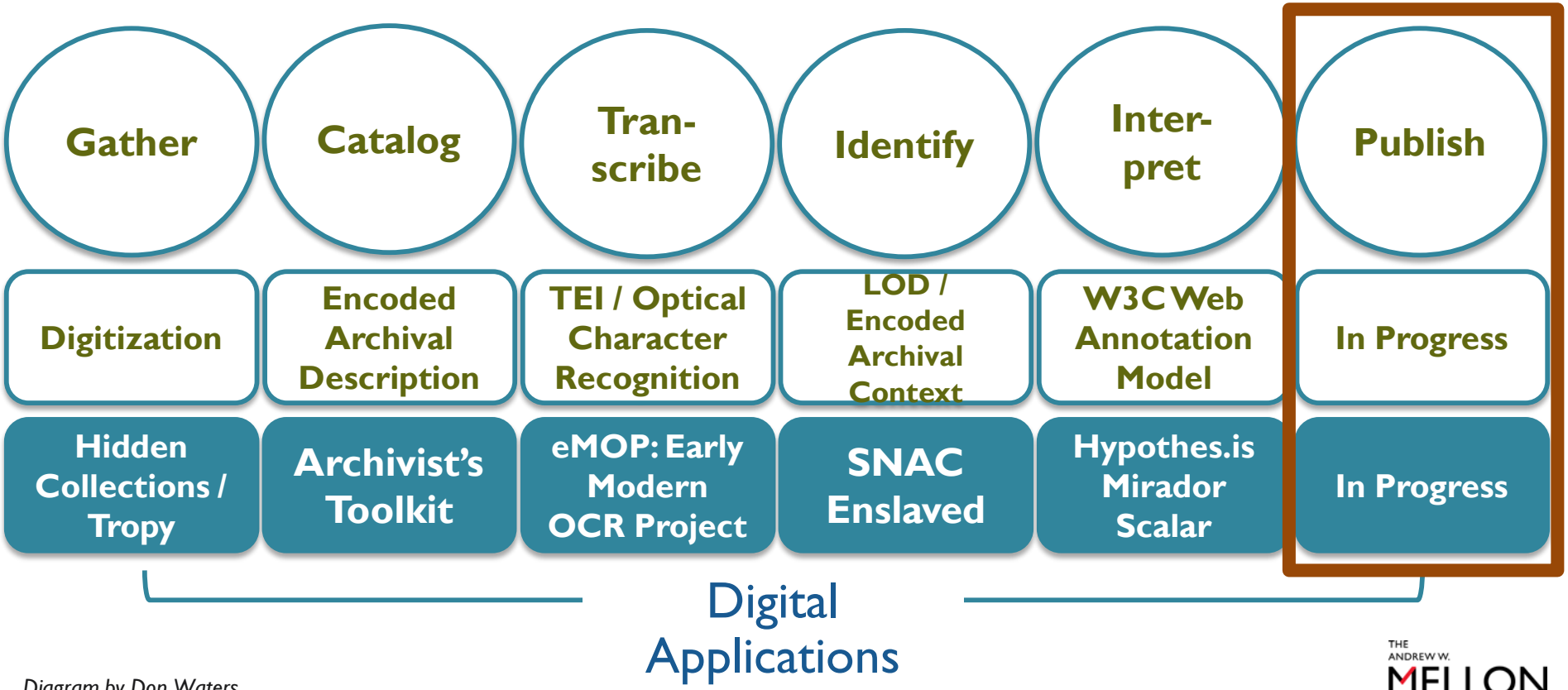

Diagram by Don Waters

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Sampling of grants focused on Asian materials

. . . and other non-English content

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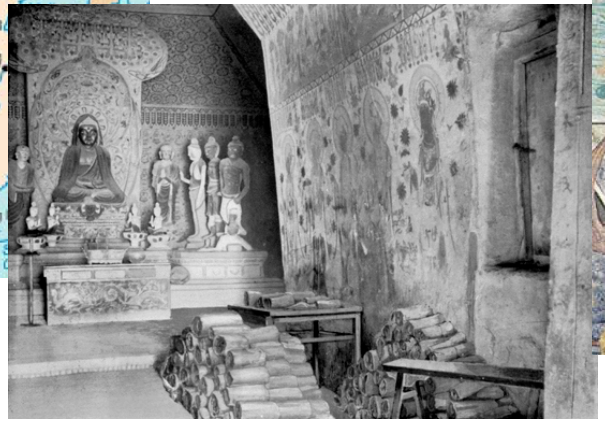
Dunhuang – Chinese cave art projects

$10.17 million over 15+ years

13 grantee organizations



32 grants

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The lessons of the Dunhuang projects

- Scholarship must be the focus
- Consider cultural property in global context
- "Digitization is the easy part"
- More digital curation, please

Image from the Diamond Sutra, Buddhist text that is the world's oldest printed book.

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CEAL Innovation Grants

Monday, January 5, 2015

Mellon Foundation Awards Grant to the Council on East Asian Libraries

Mellon Grants on the CEAL Website

Ann Arbor, MI, January 5, 2015

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded funds to the Council on East Asian Libraries (CEAL) of the Association for Asian Studies to establish a grant program, The Mellon Foundation – Council on East Asian Libraries Innovation Grants for East Asian Librarians. The new program will enable East Asian studies librarians to undertake projects addressing current and long-term challenges in collection development with the goal of strengthening the foundation for scholarly research in East Asian studies in North America. The Mellon Foundation award of $288,000 will be used for two rounds of grants over the period 2015-2017.

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University of Toronto: The Book and the Silk Roads

The Book and the Silk Roads

About ▾ People ▾ Tools ▾ Research ▾ Connect ▾

About the Project

Overview

The Book and the Silk Roads project maps connections between parts of the premodern world by describing the technology of the book.

We aim to challenge a too-familiar history, in which Gutenberg's moveable type and our own era's digital communication technologies are the natural outcomes of a triumphant Western tradition that began with Christian Rome's invention of the codex.

A more global approach to premodern book history transforms the story of human communications by revealing networks of human relationships—as well as technological and material entanglements—that knit together our premodern world.

Research Methods

Using historical research alongside new, non-destructive scientific methods, we trace the way that books were made, through local experiment and the transnational exchange of ideas, goods, and craft practices.

An English label on a 17th century Kashmiri manuscript containing Bhagavad Gita and other texts suggests a colonial history. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, MSS 01106. Photo: Jessica Lockhart, 2019.

Centering Asia, Africa, and the Middle East in the history of the book

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The Open Islamicate Texts Initiative — Arabic-script OCR

Mellon Foundation grant will support development of Persian and Arabic digitization software with two-year, $800k grant.

Enabling more accurate optical character recognition for scanned Persian and Arabic texts

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"Let me make a forecast: In the next 50 years, the entirety of our inherited archive of cultural works will have to be re-edited within a network of digital storage, access, and dissemination."

— Jerome McGann (2002)

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Annual Report (2018)

"In Scholarly Communications, some of the justice inquiries can begin with, what do we give the status of 'knowledge'? Who has access to it? By digitizing and archiving, what are we trying to save and why? What and who has been deemed precious and worth saving, and how can we critically expand that definition? What has been neglected?"

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Technology / Infrastructure Sustainability Challenges

But mainly: The challenges with maintenance

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A Digital Research Workflow for the Humanities

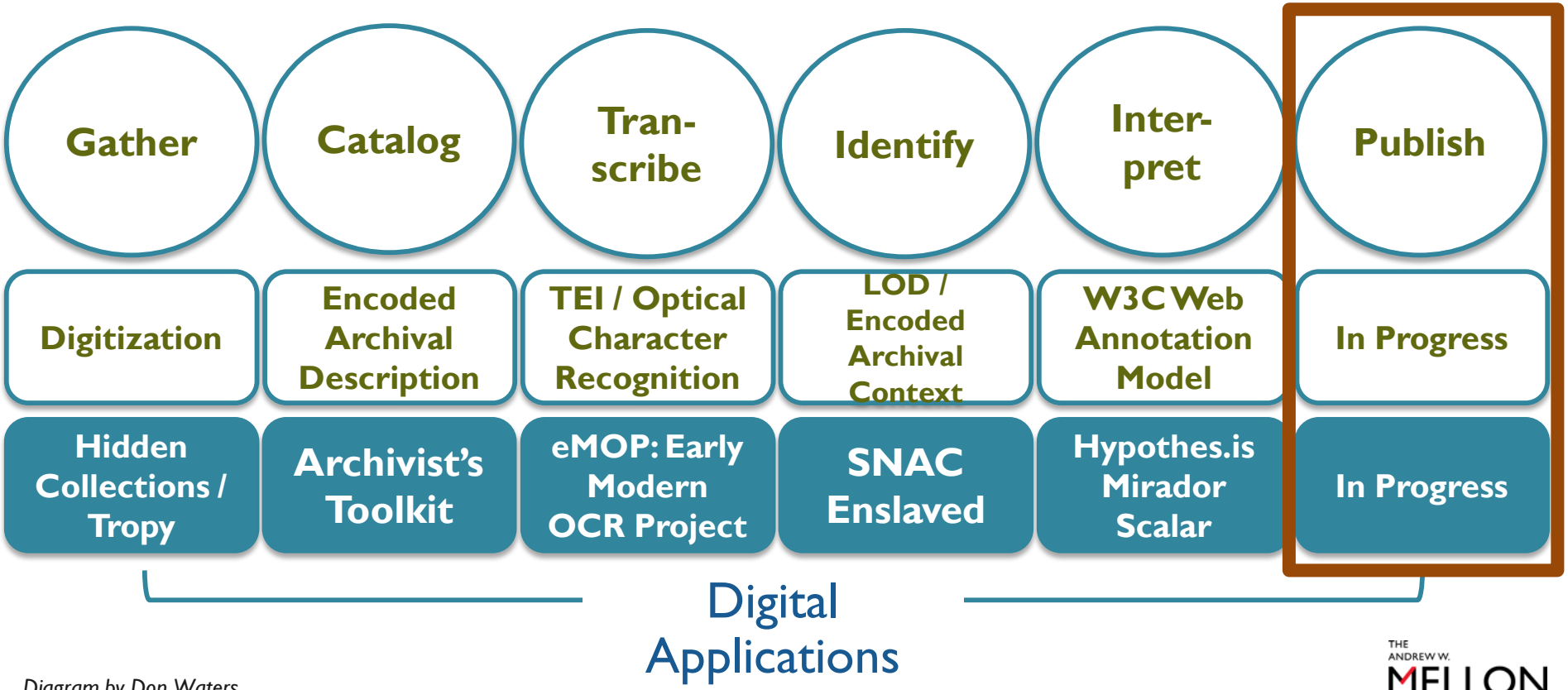

Diagram by Don Waters

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“How do you balance innovation with stability?”

— *Tara McPherson*

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Common challenges with sustaining/maintaining tech

- Financial health
- Membership model, governance
- Competition vs. collaboration
- Changes in consortial goals
- Integration into work of library

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Where are the reward structures for maintenance?

- Can you name any incentives for maintenance?
- How do maintainers get seen?
- Are there any leaders who are maintainers?
- How does maintenance get paid for?

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On the flip side—

- Can you name any incentives for innovation?
- How do innovators get seen?
- Are there any leaders who are innovators?
- How does innovation get paid for?

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Additional considerations:

- Gaps in sociocultural understanding
- Governance of maintenance
- Policymakers for maintenance
- Who's teaching maintenance? How should it be taught?
- Maintenance and audience/users?

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It's not all gloomy!

Museum of Failure

Innovation needs failure

Museum of Failure is a collection of failed products and services from around the world. The majority of all innovation projects fail and the museum showcases these failures to provide visitors a fascinating learning experience. Every item provides unique insight into the risky business of innovation.

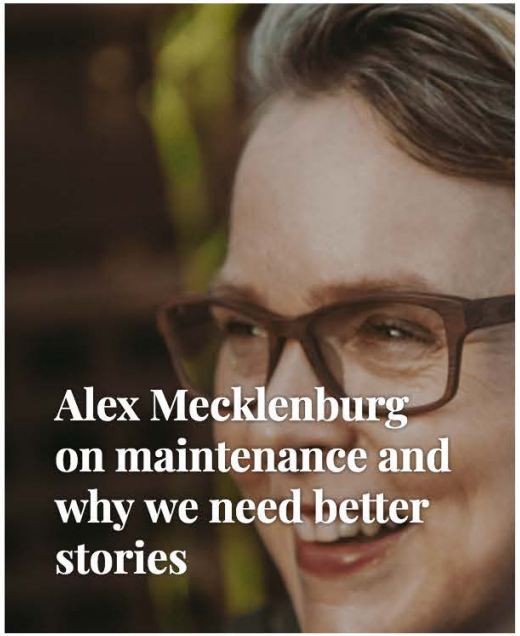
Innovation and progress require an acceptance of failure. The museum aims to stimulate productive discussion about failure and inspire us to take meaningful risks.

100+

Failed products

Festival of Maintenance

How do you maintain a football club? Oliver Holtaway on the community takeover of Bath City FC



Alex Mecklenburg on maintenance and why we need better stories

The Maintainers

WELCOME ABOUT US CONNECT **EVENTS** BLOG MEDIA

Maintainers III: Practice, Policy and Care

Washington, D.C., October 6-9 2019

Kellogg Conference Hotel at Gallaudet University

The third in a series of conferences that celebrates and unpacks the concepts of maintenance, infrastructure, repair, and the myriad forms of labor and expertise that sustain our human-built world.

ABOUT MIII | SUBMIT A PROPOSAL | FOR ATTENDEES | FOR SPONSORS

"A gentle provocation . . ."

Information Maintenance as a Practice of Care

an Invitation to Reflect and Share

The Information Maintainers; Olson, D.; Meyerson, J.; Parsons, M. A.; Castro, J.; Lassere, M.; Wright, D. J.; Arnold, H.; Galvan, A. S.; Hswe, P; Nowviskie, B.; Russell, A.; Vinsel, L.; Acker, A.

Other(s)
Abreu, A.; Acey, C.; Albert, K.; Caron, B.; Cifor, M.; Dillo, I.; Drabinski, E.; Falcao, P.; Ferraiolo, N. K.; Gunn, S.; Goodman-Wilson, D.; Hudson, M.; Jones, C.; Ko, P.; Lau, A.; Mattern, S.; Mayernik, M.; McGovern, N.; Ndumu, A.; Neal, J. C.; Owens, T.; Rodriguez, S.; Russo Carroll, S.; Shorish, Y.; Tansey, E.; Tillman, R.; Wickner, A.; Weber, C.; Williams, S.; Yarmey, L.

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Joint grant initiative between NEH and IMLS

What's New for 2019

Projects may involve researching and evaluating the practices of digital humanities and the impact of digital humanities.

For projects seeking to revitalize an existing digital humanities project, funds from this program may be used only for planning at the Level I stage.

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Digital Humanities Advancement Grants at both Level I and Level II stages may now support activities for periods of performance (award periods) up to twenty-four months.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE STUDIES.ORG

THINKING ABOUT THE BUILT, REPAIRED, AND LIVED THINGS OF THE WORLD—HOW WE MAKE THEM, AND HOW THEY MAKE US.

A humanities-grounded project!

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CI Studies Primer CI Studies Bibliography 🔍

Parting thoughts / questions

- Where are the models for maintenance in academic libraries / IT?
- How do we talk about "care work"—the work of maintenance—with administrators?
- The cloud is increasingly the infrastructure of choice. In what ways *are* we / *should* we be preparing?
- Socially just technology = maintained technology?

Thank you! Questions? Comments?

Keep in touch: @pmhswe on Twitter

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