Sabbatical Report:
"Digital Humanities, Boundary Objects and Broken-World Thinking"

Anne B. McGrail, PhD
Arts and Humanities Division

Introduction

I was awarded a two-term sabbatical and so my plan was adjusted slightly from my original plan which had been for three-terms. I had planned on writing a book, whose working title was *In Resilience and In Repair: Digital Humanities at Community Colleges and the Limits of 'Cooling Out.'* Given two terms, I changed my plan from writing the book as a single project to thinking of the planned chapters as several related shorter projects. This plan resulted in a very interesting and productive two terms. I was able to dive deep into Critical Infrastructure Studies, connect my thinking about digital humanities pedagogies to larger trends in higher education, and share my work with different audiences, either by publishing or by travelling to conferences in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Seattle, Washington.

For example, working from my planned chapter, "'Cooling Out' at Community College" I developed a paper and presented it at the ADE Summer Institute in Milwaukee. Ideas for my chapter on "Redesign Efforts and Pathways—the Cooling Out Function of Acceleration Models" were developed for a paper that I presented at the Modern Language Association convention in Seattle. The ideas for chapter 3, "In Resilience and in Repair: Anthologies, Slide Carousels and DH Curriculum" were developed into an article that I published in a special section on two-year and four-year institutional relations in *ADE Bulletin* (Fall 2020). And I developed ideas for what I had planned as my conclusion--"Settlements Without Settling: DH at CCs as an End to Cooling Out"—by working on a successful proposal for a forum at the DH2020 conference in Ottowa, Ontario; the forum was accepted but ultimately canceled because of the pandemic. These ideas also found their way into smaller projects such as my own advocacy of community college faculty projects for the NEH Humanities Connections Planning Grants panel that I served on in November 2019.

Finally, all of the reading and research that I did during my sabbatical in Fall 2019 and Winter 2020 on Digital Humanities, Critical Infrastructure Studies and Critical University Studies contributed to my work co-editing and writing the introduction for a book of essays on digital humanities infrastructure. This book, co-edited with Angel Nieves and Siobhan Senier, is entitled, *People, Practice, Power: DH and its Infrastructures.* It is now under contract with the University of Minnesota Press and is forthcoming in 2021.

Methods, Process

The methods and process for my work began with intensive reading and note-taking in the field, and then generating ideas and developing them into written essays to share with audiences. After a brief overall reflection, I provide selections and summaries of the essays and ideas I developed over the course of my sabbatical.

Reflection

As I write this, we are rounding out six months of quarantine in the pandemic's wake. We are living in uncertain times and much of the social fluidity that we have taken for granted has evaporated as we adjust to social distancing, masks, and the fragmented conversations of Zoom tiles. In 2002, I wrote my first "digital" curriculum development proposal, “"Shakespeare & Co. in the Web Enhanced Classroom." I feel grateful that since then I have continued to improve my digital pedagogy and can support my students on their educational journey in multiple modalities. This sabbatical work has deepened my understanding of how the scholarship of teaching and learning at the local level fits into the larger picture of change in higher education.

Susan Leigh Star wrote that "strangers bring new perspectives, trouble our complacency." We study the boring things, she writes, "because of what they can reveal about power and about culture."[i] In order to understand some of the patterns I have observed in higher education at large and at my own college up close, I spent a good deal of time studying "boring things." This meant looking at how institutions operate, examining the "boring" details of infrastructure like dams and bridges as well as digital infrastructures. This work led me to wonderful metaphorical thinkers such as Tara Macpherson and Deb Verhoven, whose explorations of "lenticular logic" and the "Devil's Bridge," respectively, helped me to see how studying "boring things" can be revelatory.[ii]

Perhaps it was Susan Leigh Star's work that influenced me the most, however. Her exploration of "boundary objects" and "boundary infrastructures" helped me to see why digital humanities has been so slow to enter community college conversations. Thinking about digital humanities curriculum as a new kind of "boundary object"—something that goes beyond the textbook and out into the world we inhabit online and in life--helps me to see that eventually, perhaps with the next generation of humanities faculty who are hired at Lane, our students will have access to the same digital humanities methods and approaches as do their counterparts at four-year colleges and universities. I also agree with Steven Jackson that an "ethos of repair" will have to develop alongside our obsession with innovation and shiny new things.[iii] Community college students are studies in recovery, resilience, and repair. And so this makes me hopeful that whatever we see around us that is broken—whether it be material, physical, political, social, environmental—can and will be fixed by this generation of students that we are teaching right now.

Summer, 2019: Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
Association of Departments of English Summer Institute

Figure 1ADE Summer Institute Program

I began my sabbatical by presenting a plenary paper at the Association of Departments of English (ADE) Summer Institute in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The theme for the institute was "Innovations in English: If We Build it, Will They Come?" and the panel I presented on was entitled "Writing Studies in a Digital Landscape." I was keenly aware of my presence on the panel as a representative of the community college perspective, as most attendees were from four-year colleges and universities. My presentation was entitled, "Writing CC Students into the Digital Landscape."

In "Writing CC Students into the Digital Landscape" I explored how open-access community-colleges require that scholarly fields such as writing studies always begin with practice and with our students and the conditions of their lives. I discussed how I have adapted digital humanities methods for community-college students, and talked about how close community college teaching is to advocacy work.

I focused on the role that precarity plays in our students' lives, how only the grittiest of them will overcome the effects of systemic disadvantage, claim their degrees, and achieve economic mobility, higher ed's long-held promise. I outlined a frame for how I teach writing and digital humanities; this frame has evolved from several sources over the last several years: a learning theory approach informed by David Perkins; an equity lens informed by scholars examining privilege and middle-class assumptions about learning; an approach to helping students cope with cognitive dissonance and threshold concepts; and an equity lens on the value system implicit in expectations of "college knowledge."

I discussed a "whole game" approach and how I help students connect what they learn to the big picture; I explored how I integrate writing, practice, and self-reflection in the context of the big picture; I discussed the knowledge transfer dimensions of curricular goals, and I discussed how I introduce students to tools for revealing the "hidden game" of the digital landscape, helping them to reveal the algorithmic complexity and power behind digital interfaces that they take for granted. I also discussed the importance of leveraging the social and collaborative aspects of digital life, and how I encourage students' metacognitive awareness of their learning.

The equity framework that I use consists of principles such as a recognition of working-class time orientation. Orientation toward time is a significant cultural difference across economic class. As Skeggs and Wood illustrate, working-class orientation to time is characterized by "precarity," a sense that struggles in and endurance of the present are more salient than deferral and investment in a future imaginary; such a future imaginary characterizes middleclass students' time orientation and supports conventional higher-ed routines and expectations. [iv]

I also discussed how I apply an equity lens to intellectual identity and college "belonging" in the classroom. It's hard for faculty with advanced degrees to recognize that CC students are not only not English majors but are uncertain that they belong in college at all. An equity lens on belonging sharpens the recognition that while middle-class intellectual identity involves entitlement to college belonging, working class and minority belonging is more fragile and fraught. Belonging entitlement provides middle-class students with resilience in the face of setbacks such as failure or incomprehension. As Walter and Cohen have demonstrated, students of color, women, and students from lower SES backgrounds experience belonging uncertainty disproportionately.[v] With this equity insight in mind I take care to design assignments that advance understanding of the digital landscape without catapulting underprepared students into self-doubt.

I discussed how in anticipating such self-doubt, we can help students avoid cognitive dissonance and master the threshold concepts of writing and digital humanities. These concepts can be revelatory. But in moving students through thresholds in writing and digital methods, learning theorists warn that students can get "stuck" in what they call "liminality." Learning in a liminal state involves a kind of mimicry brought on by cognitive dissonance, where students enact the surface features of a new concept while holding onto preconceived ideas and avoiding the transformative understanding of the threshold concept.

Given the saturation of the digital landscape with information, breaking through mimicry to critical understanding is both difficult and essential. Recently I have become interested in what Stephen Jackson calls "broken world thinking" and the "articulation work" of repairing complex sociotechnical forms. The equity lens insights are mechanisms for curricular repair of invisible privilege in curricula.[vi]

When teaching adult learners in a CC context, there is not a single path through these thresholds. One of the biggest rewards of CC teaching is to work with students who are already highly accomplished—whether as parents of young or grown kids, as active service military or veterans, or seasoned workers in jobs that are now changing. There are also students (and sometimes they are the same students) who are at CC to repair broken lives. Whatever their past, our students bring with them prior learning. But new ideas encountered in a writing class or any classroom can contradict or undermine the value of these students' prior learning, and cognitive dissonance can become a barrier to new understanding. Anticipating this confrontation of prior learning with new knowledge is key to community college students' success.

Recently writing studies has emphasized the importance of metacognition and other self-regulatory learning behaviors for success. A couple years ago the WPA published The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing. I find that this framework, too, must be filtered through an equity lens. It outlines habits of mind and ways of approaching writing that assume high levels of what David Conley calls "college knowledge."[vii] "College Knowledge" comprises those cognitive strategies and academic behaviors—such as metacognition--that are key facets of college readiness. Such knowledge is explicitly and tacitly reinforced in middle-class households but may elude the more precarious social and economic environments from which CC students emerge.

Applying these equity lenses around belonging uncertainty, around working-class time orientation, around cognitive dissonance and threshold concepts, and around college knowledge helps me to avoid privileged assumptions in course design and curricular expectation. The form this lens takes is varied: I use assignment design and scaffolding, spacious deadlines and cycles of reward/grades, digital engagement through You Tube, Zoom conferences and discussion boards, and especially flexible, low-stakes tasks that build students' literacies in reading and in written and digital compositions. I shared examples of these assignments with institute attendees.

Slides from the presentation are here.

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January 2020 Seattle, Washington:
Modern Language Association Annual Convention

The Modern Language Association (MLA) is a premier professional association for the study and teaching of languages and literature. Until recently it has privileged four-year colleges and universities, but it has done outreach and development in community colleges in part because of the job crisis in the humanities. This year, the MLA Committee on Community Colleges hosted a session, "The Teacher-Scholar at the Two-Year College." My presentation

on that panel, “Avoiding the Community College ‘Cool Out’ in English Graduate Programs: Some Concerns about Equity and the Discipline in a Tough Job Market,” explored two related concepts of interest to me: the recent focus on acceleration and streamlining of curricula at community colleges under the auspices of reducing time to degree, and what I see as an incipient graduate “tracking”—a “Guided Pathways” of graduate school—such that some graduate students are tracked into community college humanities teaching and scholarship while others are encouraged to follow a research and university teaching track. This essay was my attempt to distill some of my research and thinking about infrastructures of higher education and forays into Critical University Studies and Critical Infrastructure Studies.

A statement by David F. Labaree prompted my thinking in this arena: He writes:

> Almost everyone can go to college, but the institutions that are most accessible (community colleges) provide the smallest boost to a student’s life chances, whereas the ones that offer the surest entrée into the best jobs (major research universities) are highly selective. This extreme mixture of equality and inequality, of accessibility and stratification, is a striking and fascinating characteristic of American education.[viii]

I shared my observations about the phenomenon of “cooling out” and the often unacknowledged role that community college policies play in enacting it. The term “cooling out” haunted me since I first stumbled upon it while reading Brint and Karabel’s fascinating study of community colleges in America, *The Diverted Dream.* In a tough humanities job market, community colleges are getting-new attention recently--from graduate programs, grant funders, and professional associations such as MLA and CCCC. This attention, of course, is both warranted and belated, and has taken the form of calls for more tailored graduate preparation to teach in CCs. I argued that this term “cooling out” provides a framework for understanding and making visible institutional impacts of this new attention.

So, what is “cooling out”? Scholars have argued that after WWII community colleges served a “cooling out” function in American higher education (Brint and Karobel, Clark). As Burton Clark put it from his vantage point at the beginning of the CC movement, “The cooling out process in higher education is one whereby systematic discrepancy between aspiration and avenue is covered over, and stress for the individual and the system is minimized.”[ix] The community college, for Clark, “motivates and mollifies” simultaneously through slow adaptation.[x]

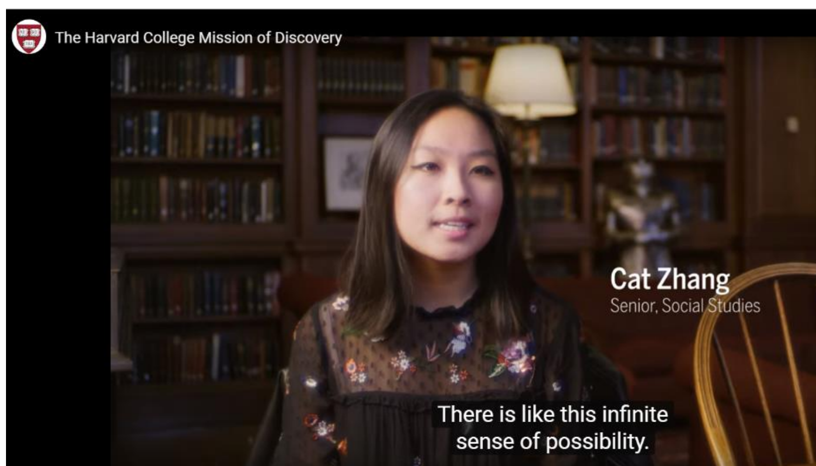
Several features of this process characterize what Clark called the “soft denial” of “cooling out”:

- First, Substitute achievement: the institution provides alternative achievement—a differentiated option that helps community college students adapt to failure

- Second, gradual disengagement—institutions foster a deteriorating sense of engagement with original student goals
- Third, an objective denial of options: the student experiences this path as inevitable
- Fourth, “proper classification and placement” in community colleges replace the selective function of SATs, grades and financial resources in selective schools.
- Finally, this can only happen with the help of “agents of consolation”: Faculty, counselors and advisors explicitly steer students toward paths that support the “soft denial” of original goals. The aim of these agents is “to reduce aspiration as well as to define and help fulfill it” (Clark 576).

On first pass, some might say that this “cooling out” function is an outmoded description of the mission of the CC. The current vogue in redesign efforts at more than 300 CCs--and climbing--would seem if anything to be heating up CC student ambition.[xi] After all, the stated aim of such redesigns to improve success and accelerate time to credential supports such a “heating up” view. But I am alerted by Clark’s warning that the CC function in higher ed is “to be a general screen behind which unnamed and unperceived tasks are performed” (Open Door 174). It is these “backstage elements of work practice” (as sociologist Leigh Star put it) with which I am concerned here. “[I]t takes some digging to unearth the dramas at the heart of system design,” writes Star in her study of infrastructures. To get at them we perform what she calls an “infrastructural inversion.” [xii]

The institutional “backstage” of cooling out is hidden in plain sight if you pay attention. Key architects of the Guided Pathways movement recently wrote that CC students flounder because of “too much choice.”[xiii] This framing of the causes for CC student failure as one of “too many choices” stands in stark contrast to the way elite four-year schools frame choice. Let’s take a look at a tiny sample. In its recruiting materials, “The Harvard Mission of Discovery,” for example, Harvard College emphasizes the “infinite” choices available to its students.[xiv] And even public R1 Berkeley plainly calls out expansive choice in its recruiting materials—“go wide and go deep” it counsels, with more than 13,000 courses to choose from[xv] (See Figure 1).



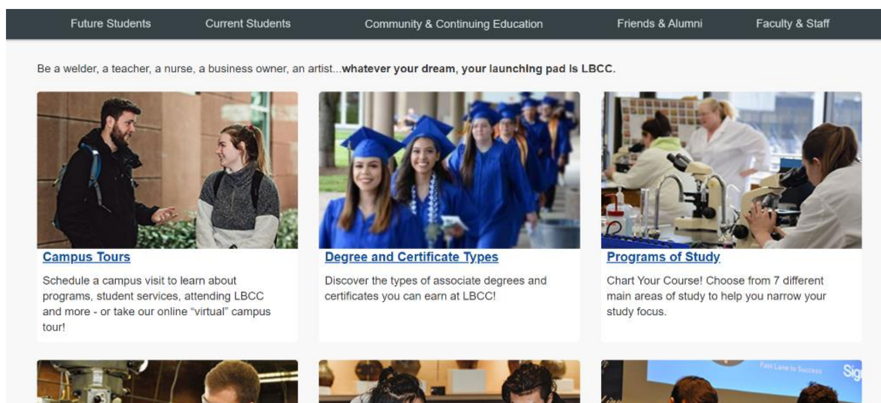


Figure 2 Harvard, Berkeley, Linn Benton Messages to Students about Choices

Let's compare these to how choice is framed at Guided Pathway college Linn Benton Community College: "Be a welder, a teacher, a nurse, a business owner, an artist...whatever your dream, your launching pad is LBCC."[xvi] Or Sinclair College: "Graduate with the right skills to succeed in today's jobs."[xvii] These are reasonable goals—but not infinite.

This is not to say that community college leaders—or even the Ivy League researchers for whom community colleges are their object of inquiry—individually intend to intensify an already stratified system. But as sociologists Powell and DiMaggio tell us, institutions are like machines that shape, mediate and channel social choices (2).[xviii] "What has meaning and what actions are possible," they write, are circumscribed by the structural power of institutions (9). This is true for CC students and it is true for future CC faculty.

In this light, I then turned to the new attention being paid to community colleges. I suggested that in the "TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College"[xix] the document's authors and readers may unintentionally formalize the "cooling out function" that has occurred circumstantially for decades, taking it to another institutional level and standard. Those of us who have been at community colleges since graduate school are aware of the passive cool-out that can occur with a CC career. But if the form that the new attention paid to community colleges takes formalize a cooling out, it could change the way English is taught and learned in community colleges for a generation. Looking at the 2016 TYCA Guidelines, we notice that it plainly calls out the marketability of faculty and makes an explicit claim for that marketability's relationship to training in graduate school:[xx]

> Prospective two-year English faculty become more valuable and marketable to hiring institutions when they have varied experience and training, including composition, communications, basic writing, technical writing, writing centers, literary studies, and reading. Even more importantly, those interested in teaching in the two-year college must be prepared for the unique community college context, which includes working with the diverse student population served at community colleges and doing so in a range of instructional modes (n.p.).

Most of us who teach as English generalists will recognize the work noted here. In the course of a career, we've been called upon to develop competencies beyond the traditional PhD. My concern here is that in calling for such wide expertise at the moment of graduate training, we implicitly bypass the deep dive in the discipline. I am reminded here of Clark's comments on the CC: "the student . . . transfers to terminal work . . . . [and this] terminal student can be made to appear not so radically different from the transfer student, e.g., an 'engineering aide' instead of an 'engineer' and hence he goes to something with a status of his own" (Open Door 164).[xxi]

Importantly, the *Guidelines* include calls for specialized graduate program tracks and "other credentials that signal students' expertise in two-year college English instruction." They also suggest that graduate programs "be receptive to innovative culminating projects that might be more useful for aspiring two-year college teacher-scholars than the traditional thesis or dissertation" (n.p.) While I do agree that some graduate training in CC work is valuable, the instrumentalism of tracking for market purposes that concerns me. The regulative,

normative, and cultural-cognitive demands of institutional motivation could have unintended impacts on the future quality and character of English study at CCs.[xxii]

Here are some of my concerns about those impacts:

First, this kind of tracking partakes in precisely the kind of market solutionism that emerging humanities fields such as Critical Infrastructure Studies and Critical University Studies call into question.

Second, this tracking de-emphasizes humanities subjects and literature other than composition. While this could be valuable for some Writing Studies and Comp and Rhet graduate students who aim to focus on foundational writing/FYC in their research, for literature specialists—and WS and CR scholars with other interests--it requires a distinct change of focus toward institutional goals.

My third concern is one of staging and timing: the disciplinary focus of graduate school—the "deep dive"--is replaced here with a professional focus on the institutional demands of a future imaginary CC context.

In addition, using graduate curriculum to track faculty creates career path dependence for these students. What coursework and disciplinary artifacts will be replaced by this professional preparation?

I also worry that such calls for shifting the burden of learning the CC profession from the career itself to graduate training threatens to collapse what I consider two distinct communities of practice. The graduate credential formally recognizes membership in the first, disciplinary, community of practice—and this credential has a long shelf life. But membership in the second community of practice involves situated learning—the context of teaching and engaging in the institutional life of a community college—and "legitimate peripheral participation"[xxiii] through shared repertoires and shared practice over time. There is no replacing this practice with a few graduate courses or internships.

While many might say that it's important to make English program graduates "career ready," this kind of vocationalizing of the English discipline threatens to further stratify it. I am reminded here of what Linda Adler Kassner calls the "dominance of the college and career readiness frame."[xxiv] This dominant narrative, she writes, "suggests that the purpose of education is to prepare students . . . to be economic competitors" (125). My concern is that what Adler Kassner writes of learning at the undergraduate level is increasingly true at the graduate level: a movement from a deep dive into the English discipline and toward professional training becomes "about credentialing for the purposes of vocationalism" (Labaree, qtd in Adler-Kassner 126).

In Writing Studies at the undergraduate level, Adler-Kassner writes, this movement has meant that "the actual content of academic disciplines and the connections between that

content and [writing] strategies is disappearing. . . . Credentialism," she writes, "means that the content really doesn't matter" (126). My fear is that professionalizing some graduate students toward community college careers as a response to the job crisis will result in a track of community college English teaching that will be further "apart from specific disciplinary content" (126).

The job crisis in the humanities can bring with it either a scarcity mindset or a mindset of generosity and expansiveness. However belated, it appears that some graduate programs, professional associations, and grant funders are paying attention to the valid contribution and knowledge creation happening at community colleges. If these entities are serious about helping their graduates to avoid the "cool out" and sustain a satisfying professional career as teacher-scholar-activists, I suggested, they can raise their own awareness of their structural power with respect to community colleges. English faculty leaders at four-year institutions can develop meaningful scholarly connections with community college colleagues—and not just in the compliance arenas of articulation agreements and assessment. The boundary infrastructure of the curriculum—in particular the shrinking number and diversity of literature courses offered at community colleges under pressure to accelerate students time-to-degree—is a good place to start.

Figure 3 MLA Panel, "The Teacher-Scholar at the Two-Year College"

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Winter 2020: Essay "A New Boundary Object: Digital Humanities Between Two-Year and Four-Year English Programs"
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A New Boundary Object: Digital Humanities between Two-Year and Four-Year English Programs

Anne B. McGrail

Anne B. McGrail is a faculty instructor in the Department of Language, Literature, and Communication at Lane Community College, Eugene, OR.

> Almost everyone can go to college, but the institutions that are most accessible (community colleges) provide the smallest boost to a student's life chances, whereas the ones that offer the surest entrée into the best jobs (major research universities) are highly selective. This extreme mixture of equality and inequality, of accessibility and stratification, is a striking and fascinating characteristic of American education.
> —David F. Labaree

AS I WRITE, the entire higher education sector has been shaken by the pandemic and is unsure of its future. Many colleagues have been laid off, others are struggling to translate their pedagogy online, and our students are grappling with bandwidth limits, interruptions at home, and economic instability. My e-mail in-box is stuffed with free offers of commercial course products to lighten my load. So whatever was normal six months ago has changed for good, and there is great cause for grief and worry. In this context, it's difficult to think about institutional futures. And yet to imagine—and insist upon—a future for humanities in higher education is perhaps what humanists can offer right now. So, it is in this spirit that I propose a path for strengthening connections between two- and four-year institutions.

Figure 4"A New Boundary Object"

That "boundary infrastructure of the curriculum" was what I concerned myself with in an essay published in the *ADE Bulletin* (Fall 2020 Figure 4) entitled, "A New Boundary Object: Digital Humanities Between Two-Year and Four-Year English Programs." That issue of the ADE Bulletin dedicated a section to strengthening relationships among two-year and four-year institutions.

In my contribution to the issue, I suggest that because of its porous boundaries and constant change, digital humanities curriculum could act as a conduit for strengthening relationships among two-year and four-year humanities faculty. I acknowledged that collaboration between English departments at two- and four-year institutions will mean unsettling long-standing routines and assumptions about the value and role of community colleges in the American higher educational infrastructure. After all, structural power and institutional dependencies always complicate quick adoption of anything new. And two-year colleges have long been seen as absorbing the run-off of underprepared students from four-year schools. They have helped maintain the democratic value of access in principle while maintaining exclusivity in practice. One long-standing assumption of community college faculty is that they don't push the frontiers of knowledge in the field; such an assusmption challenges genuine reciprocal engagement. (Louis Menand once wrote that "doctoral education is where the system reproduces itself" (10); but he also wrote that a "field can have an impact on a student through just one course" (11).)

How might the uneven development of digital humanities provide for more meaningful collaboration among two- and four-year institutions? To answer this question, I explore the frame of communities of practice to understand the professional circumstance of community college teachers after graduate training.

In my essay, I suggest that as a boundary object of the discipline the curriculum holds promise for energizing institutional relationships. Boundary objects mediate between two communities of practice—here, the mastery of disciplinary content and methods of English

characterizing graduate training and the mastery of expertise in situated practice—in the "artful integration" that characterizes community college contexts. Knowledge transmission through curricular boundary objects takes developing and then artfully integrating content by active translation, accommodation, gestalt-switching, and creating workarounds to manage divergent viewpoints (Bowker and Star 292). All pedagogy involves these moves. But at community colleges, communities of practice are inextricable and often invisible; the expert and successful transmission of college-level disciplinary knowledge to diverse students in the same classroom is the essence of work at two-year colleges. This signature of community college professional life is an expanded and intensified pedagogical repertoire that supports artful integration of disciplinary material for students who vary in terms of motivation, preparation, socioeconomic status, and culture.

In its character and value as both disciplinary knowledge and site of translation and negotiation, the boundary object of curriculum allows us to see how dissemination of digital humanities can provide a conduit for improved relations among two- and four-year institutions. Given the uneven development of digital humanities at community colleges, community college faculty members must not only integrate the emerging field into their own knowledge base but also distill and artfully integrate digital humanities for community college students who bring limited digital fluencies and Internet access to their educational experience. This exigence provides the opportunity for engagement with four-year English programs in a common aim of normalizing the discipline across institutions.

In their reflections on the future of graduate preparation for two-year college teaching, Jensen and Toth emphasize that "English studies has an enormous stake in two-year colleges" (578):

> Two-year colleges have long been an important pathway to four-year institutions, particularly for students from underrepresented groups. The American Association of Community Colleges reports that "28 percent of bachelors degree earners started at a community college and 47 percent took at least one course at a community college." This role is poised to grow as the cost of attending universities increases, dual and concurrent enrollment programs run by two-year colleges expand, and municipal and state "promise" programs make community colleges tuition-free for many students. In the near future, the majority of US undergraduates may well be taking all of their introductory composition and lower-division language and literature courses at two-year colleges, and deciding on their post-transfer majors accordingly. (579)[xxv]

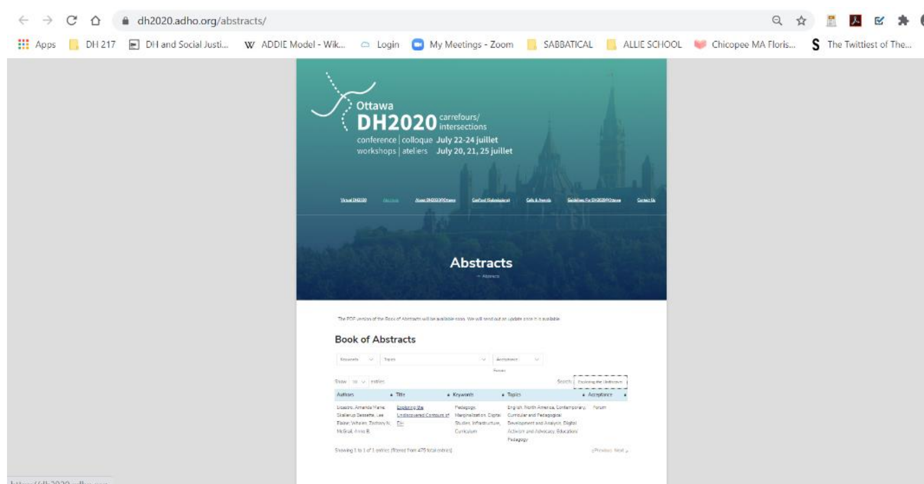
To respond to this reality, I call for a new boundary infrastructure, energized by a common commitment to social justice through education. I suggest that this will take a long-term investment by both two-year and four-year colleges in developing digital assets, collaborating on projects, and articulating competencies that improve equity at community colleges while supporting continuity and growth at four-year colleges.

Robert Samuels warns that "as our society becomes more unequal, all levels of education also become more stratified" (2). If we are to avoid the worst effects of this stratification in our own discipline, we need to recognize that all students play a role in transmitting English knowledge. Digital humanities has changed the field and it is here to stay even as it rapidly evolves with and through technology. When we leave community colleges behind, we neglect a key component of the higher educational infrastructure at this time of disciplinary change. We then risk relegating digital humanities to a rarified realm of specialists. Instead, through collaboration between two- and four-year colleges and through community engagement, we can expand the field to the arena of its most compelling relevance: as a method for understanding our present global predicament with technology and as a way to imagine technology's role in sustaining or compromising human and planetary life.

Fall 2019-Spring 2020
DH2020: Forum Panel Proposal Development

In August 2019 I was approached by Lee Skallerup Bessette to develop a forum proposal with other DH scholars for the DH2020 Convention in Ottowa July 2020. The forum, titled, "Exploring the Undiscovered Contours of DH" was accepted for the convention but because of COVID19, we were unable to hold the session (See Figure 3). Development of the forum proposal was a complex process which began in October 2019; reviewers responded in January 2020 and then we responded to reviewers before being accepted. The panelists and myself met on Zoom twice and developed our proposal on Google Docs together. Here is the 150-word abstract for the forum, which we may be able to offer in future after the pandemic has played out:

> How can scholars on the margins of DH articulate their work in DH publications, grants, and other professional and disciplinary outlets? In this interactive forum, we aim to explore inclusion--or exclusion--in what counts as "digital humanities" among scholars across disciplines, institutional contexts, and employment statuses. We begin by surveying audience members about the alternative ways that they represent their digital work and their different institutional contexts. We then ask participants to explore how esoteric terms such as "digital humanities" may be illegible to administrators and the public and the effects of this illegibility on their pedagogy and professional work. After collectively articulating the problem as it stands today, forum leaders will facilitate a problem-solving conversation that might begin addressing the issue.



Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations, in consultation with the DH2020 Local Organizers and Program Committee, has decided to cancel this year's in-person conference in Ottawa, which was scheduled for 19-25 July 2020. This has been an exceptionally difficult decision, but individual and communal health is our priority. An in-person conference would endanger attendees and members of the general public. We recognize this is a loss for colleagues who look to the annual conference to share their work and to enjoy the networking and community that the conference entails. We share in the sadness for this lost opportunity.
Given the deep personal investment made by the organizers and the DH community in the 2020 academic program, ADHO is presently evaluating the feasibility of holding a virtual conference in its place. We hope to communicate further information about this in early May.

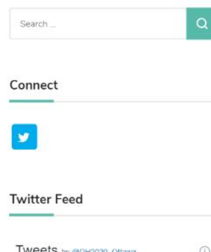


Figure 5 DH2020 Conference Cancelled

Fall 2019: NEH Humanities Connections Review Panel
In November 2019 I participated in a day-long NEH review panel for NEH Humanities Connections Planning Grants. Reading and evaluating the grant proposals I could see the high-quality work that is being done integrating humanities across disciplines. From the website: "The Humanities Connections program seeks to expand the role of the humanities in undergraduate education at two- and four-year institutions. Awards support innovative curricular approaches that foster productive partnerships among humanities faculty and their counterparts in the social and natural sciences and in pre-service or professional programs (such as business, engineering, health sciences, law, computer science, and other technology-driven fields), in order to encourage and develop new integrative learning opportunities for students." I hope that at some point in the future Lane will build its capacity to support such work on our campus.

Fall 2019-Summer 2020
People, Practice, Power: DH and Its Infrastructures

What follows are excerpts from "Introduction" to the volume, co-written by myself, Angel David Nieves, and Siobhan Senier. The book is under contract with University of Minnesota Press.

Our volume's title, *People, Practice, Power: DH and its Infrastructures*, intends to foreground the *human* side of Digital Humanities infrastructure. For most people, "infrastructure" calls to mind things like hardware, software, storage capacity, funding, and facilities. But the writers in this volume ask us to *humanize* infrastructure--to consider what the sociologist Susan Leigh Star called those "invisible layers of control and access" that undergird any scientific or scholarly work.[xxvi] Your data visualization tools and content management systems were, after all, designed by people, people in very specific social and economic locations, and they are used by groups of people in still other, often heterogeneous and contradictory social and economic positions. They are deployed, shared and repaired in a tangle of institutional protocols, disciplinary conventions, and systemic inequalities. It is these everyday, deeply felt and sometimes disenfranchising practices and relations that most concern the authors gathered in this book.

Two other sociologists, Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio, once observed that "institutions are not necessarily the products of conscious design."[xxvii] From its very first volume, the *Debates* series has taken up some of the often unconscious designs that have characterized the emerging field of Digital Humanities. Indeed, as DH has become institutionalized, the social and disciplinary relationships that constitute it have arguably come to govern "what has meaning and what actions are possible" within it, as Powell and DiMaggio might say.[xxviii] Steven Brint and Jerome Karabel, who write about the history and economic promise/dispossession of community colleges, put the matter this way: "organizations may make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please," because the development of institutions takes place "within larger fields of power and social structure."[xxix] (346). When we drew up our initial cfp, we wanted to zero in specifically on some of these larger fields of power and social structure. We wanted to gather, under one big tent, some of the scholars, students and practitioners who have been thinking deeply about and indeed living with and working around some of the power dynamics and social structures that now seem baked into DH.

In the current crisis in higher education, it's easy to be pessimistic about the ways that institutional power and resources shape and stymie us. But institutional arrangements are also shaped by participants' agency, and many of our authors undertake what Thomas B. Lawrence would call "institutional biographies" that complicate that overdetermination. "Good biography," Lawrence and his colleagues write, "portrays the social structural influences, the opportunities for agency, and the successes and failures of the individual to shape their world."[xxx] Our ability—our human ability--to reflect on our embeddedness within distinct power structures provides a direction for action in the field, what Pamella Lach and Jessica Pressman in this volume call "infrastructural imaginaries." On some fundamental level, as Patrick Svensson and David Theo Goldberg have suggested,

infrastructure in ultimately “about imagination and connecting deep conceptual ideas with material manifestations.”[xxxi]

In recent years, we have seen the values and complexities of DH dramatically shift with explosions of new funding opportunities (and their attendant reporting and deliverables requirements), new job advertisements (and the redesign of “old” tenure lines to include digital foci), and new publications that reflect new understandings of DH, its institutions, and infrastructures. DH is now a contact zone where phenomena such as humanistic deliberation, aesthetic inquiry, and aspirations for institutional and social justice collide with the star system, the supplanting of tenured labor forces with contingent ones, neoliberal management and market ideologies, and the sheer acceleration of digital technologies themselves. Infrastructure, in its most rudimentary definition, comprises the facilities and structures that a house or a university or a society requires in order to maintain basic operations. It *costs,* indisputably: money, labor, and human capital. But it is also profoundly relational. Seeing Digital Humanities infrastructure in this way--as a set of evolving relations and dependencies and not just static resources--supports a critical Digital Humanities practice that acknowledges institutional constraints and engages in purposeful, reflexive action.

[. . . .]

When we think about “infrastructure” in this context, we are thinking of the inescapable infrastructural dependencies--shifting and unstable labor requirements, grant-funding exigencies, spatial and other physical requirements, version control and lapse. The authors in this volume see infrastructures beyond the technical, hardware, and financial needs of their own institutions, programs, and centers. They are keenly interested in political, social, and economic factors including promotion and tenure processes, student research support, pedagogical development, and even extra-institutional instruments such as project charters and memoranda of understanding. These authors call attention to the ineluctably human side of DH infrastructure, and insist on rethinking infrastructure in *human* terms--perhaps one of the more radical things that DH can do.

We hope that our volume builds on the “installed base” of the textual infrastructure established by the *Debates in the Digital Humanities* series. Earlier volumes have tracked conversations and controversies around DH’s “big tent” metaphor, and about how (and whether) DH can be fruitfully practiced outside the Digital Humanities Center (DHC) and large institutions with their considerable resources. [. . . .]

Although we did not necessarily intend to include essays in what is now being called “Critical Infrastructure Studies,” many of the pieces below resonate with issues raised in this emerging field. Alan Liu, as a member of the Critical Infrastructure Studies Collective, defines infrastructure as “the social-cum-technological milieu that at once enables the fulfillment of human experience and enforces constraints on that experience.” In this definition, infrastructure comprises more than just the transportation, electrical grids,

Internet, and other media and hardware through which and upon which culture happens: it *is* culture; or at least, it operationalizes our experience of it. To Liu, "the word 'infrastructure' can now give us the same kind of general purchase on social complexity that Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, and others sought when they reached for their all-purpose word, 'culture'. . . and critics will need to attend to "that cyborg being whose making, working, disciplining, performance, gender formation, and hybridity are increasingly part of the core identity of late modern culture."

Many of our authors respond, we believe, at least implicitly to the call to consider infrastructure much as we used to think about "culture"; however, our first two essays do so explicitly. James Malazita, who teaches DH at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, describes what he calls an "epistemic infrastructure" in the form of technological instrumentalism. This epistemic infrastructure, he determines, seeks to cordon off technical expertise from critical inquiry. This practice will not occur only in STEM disciplines; it threatens to take over our universities wholesale, he warns, if DH does not bring its humanistic tools to challenge it. By exploring the tensions among multiple epistemic regimes, DH scholars can subvert this subversion. In a similar vein, Erin Glass issues a clarion call for digital humanists to question academic institutions' wholesale and passive adoption of capitalist digital technologies in an educational technology market numbering in the hundreds of billions of dollars. Focusing on what she calls the "invisible discipline" of pervasive campus digital technologies, she surveys early 21st century classroom instances of what Shoshana Zuboff calls "surveillance capitalism" as they operate in the digital classroom.

In our section "Beyond the DHC" several essays re-examine the very premise of large-scale, collaborative DH projects dependent on a lab or center. [. . . .]

Our second cluster of essays is called "Human Infrastructures: Labor Considerations and Communities of Practice." This section includes alternatives to the DHC, even for institutions lucky enough to have robust DHC's in place. [. . . .]

All of these writers are theorizing infrastructure as communities of practice, with all of the attendant relationship building (and relationship *care)* that such communities require. In the 2012 *Debates* volume, Tara Macpherson identified a "lenticular" organizational principle that governed both computational design principles and racist power dynamics in mid-20th century America. Lenticular logic provides an indispensable critical tool for examining interstitial, infrastructural effects that isolate and render invisible what are interdependent functions of power and oppression. One could fruitfully extend the isolating logic of the lenticular lens to the separation in higher education of issues of quality in research and teaching with those of labor and precarious faculty conditions.

Previous *Debates* volumes noted the persistent marginalization of pedagogy in DH scholarship, and so our third essay cluster turns to just that topic. [. . . .]

We admit that we were profoundly disappointed that, in the end, we were unable to secure submissions from scholars and practitioners at community colleges, HBCUs, and

Tribal Colleges for this collection, though we devoted substantial time to outreach among friends and colleagues at such institutions. What does the failure to locate this work signal about the impact of the institutional stratifications our field inherits and deploys? We are reminded of Mary Douglas's suggestion that institutional classifications say a great deal about how we understand ourselves. We are also reminded of Deb Verhoeven's insistence that omissions from the archive are themselves archived; silences in a field must be critically examined as an inherited affordance of the infrastructure itself. But silence, like absence, is more difficult to examine than is active debate. "The more opaque the mode of transmitting inequalities," write Brint and Karabel, "the more effective it is likely to be in legitimating these inequalities" (234), and nothing is more opaque than absence.[xxxii]

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The essays in the volume at hand give us hope that, at least in some places, scholars, librarians, teachers and students are working together, *tactically* as Liu might say, to create intelligent, *humane* projects and paradigms. They point up the lingering tensions between the demands of digital knowledge production and the kind of support that variously positioned institutions are able (or willing) to provide today. Outmoded and even inoperable reward systems demonstrate a lack of consensus about how to support the intellectual work of DH; successful, influential projects stand as high-water marks in a young field, while other highly admired and prized projects are abandoned for lack of reliable, systemic support. These are just some of the infrastructural hazards that characterize the ongoing project of the house that DH built.

Endnotes

[i] Star, Susan Leigh. "Got Infrastructure? How Standards, Categories and Other Aspects of Infrastructure Influence Communication." The 2nd Social Study of IT workshop at the LSE ICT and Globalization. April 22-23, 2002. p 3.

[ii] Macpherson, Tara. "Why Are the Digital Humanities So White? Or Thinking the Histories of Race and Computation." In *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, edited by Matthew K. Gold. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. Verhoven, Deb. "As Luck Would Have It: Serendipity and Solace in Digital Infrastructure." Feminist Media Histories, Vol.2, Number 1, pps. 7-28.

[iii] Jackson, Steven J. "Rethinking Repair," in Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo Boczkowski, and Kirsten Foot, eds. *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality and Society.* MIT Press: Cambridge MA, 2014.)

[iv] Skeggs, Beverley and Helen Wood. *Reacting to Reality Television: Performance, Audience and Value.* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 232.

[v] Walter, G.M. and G.L Cohen. Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2007). "A question of belonging: Race, social fit, and achievement." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(1), 82–96.

[vi] Jackson, Steven J. "Rethinking Repair," in Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo Boczkowski, and Kirsten Foot, eds. *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality and Society.* MIT Press: Cambridge MA, 2014.)

[vii] *College Knowledge: What It Really Takes for Students to Succeed and What We Can Do to Get Them Ready*. Jossey Bass 2008.

[viii] David F. Labaree qtd in Brint, Steven. *Two Cheers for Higher Education Why American Universities Are Stronger Than Ever--And How to Meet the Challenges They Face*. Princeton University Press, 2019, p. 125.

[ix] Clark, B. R. "The 'Cooling-out' Function in Higher Education. *American Journal of Sociology*, 65, 1960, 569–576, p. 576.
[x] The "cooling out thesis" and its application through academic advisors is a controversial thesis. Education researcher Peter Riley Bahr failed to find direct correlation between advising and declining success. However, he notes, "as a broad institutional effect . . . . cooling out may be an ongoing process in community colleges" (726). Bahr, Peter Riley. "Cooling Out in the Community College: What Is the Effect of Academic Advising on Students' Chances of Success?" *Research in Higher Education*, vol. 49, no. 8, 2008, pp. 704–732., doi:10.1007/s11162-008-9100-0.
[xi] See, for instance, Jenkins, Davis, et al. "Redesigning Your College Through Guided Pathways: Lessons on Managing Whole-College Reform From the AACC Pathways Project." *Community College Research Center*, 12 Sept. 2019, https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/redesigning-your-college-guided-pathways.html.
[xii] Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure." *American Behavioral Scientist* 1999, 33, 77, p. 377-8.
[xiii] Thomas Bailey and Davis Jenkins et al. "Matching Talents to Careers: from Self-Directed to Guided Pathways" in *Matching Students to Opportunity*).
[xiv] . "Why Harvard." Harvard College, https://college.harvard.edu/admissions/why-harvard.
[xv] "UC Berkeley." *Outreach*, 1 Jan. 2019, https://admissions.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/AE_OUA_2019_Outreach_GeneralBrochure_FINAL_Web.pdf.
[xvi] "Get to Know Us." *Linn Benton*, https://www.linnbenton.edu/future-students/get-to-know-us/ . /
[xvii] "About Sinclair." *Sinclair College*, https://www.sinclair.edu/about/
[xviii] DiMaggio, Paul J., and Walter W. Powell. *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008.
[xix] *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 45, no. 1, Sept 2017, pp. 8–19.

[xx] The TYCA document is inspired by the 2014 Report of the *MLA Task Force on Doctoral Study in Modern Language and Literature*, which suggests that "graduate programs should be centered on students' diverse learning and career development needs" (1-2).
[xxi] Clark, Burton R. *The Open Door College: a Case of Study*. McGraw-Hill, 1960.
[xxii] Neoinstitutionalists speak of 3 pillars of institutional motivation: (See Alan Liu, "Toward Critical infrastructure Studies" *NASSR* 2018 (4/21/2018) -- p. 15)

1. Regulative—tells you to do
2. Normative—everyone does it
3. Cultural-cognitive—your internalized sense of what it is unimaginable not to do

[xxiii] Lave, Jean and Etienne Wenger. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.
[xxiv] "The Companies We Keep or The Companies We Would Like to Keep: Strategies and Tactics in Challenging Times." *WPA* 36.1 Fall/Winter 2012: 119-140.
[xxv] Jensen, Darin L., and Christie Toth. "Unknown Knowns: The Past, Present, and Future of Graduate Preparation for Two-Year College English Faculty." *College English*, vol. 79, no. 6, July 2017, pp. 561–92.
[xxvi] "Got Infrastructure?," 3.
[xxvii] *The New Institutionalism,* 8.
[xxviii] Ibid, 9.
[xxix] *Institutional Origins,* 346.
[xxx] "Institutional Work," 55.
[xxxi] 330.
[xxxii] 234.