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Digital Humanities, Access, and the Teaching of Russian Language and Culture

IRENE KRASNER, THOMAS JESÚS GARZA

1. Introduction
In their introduction to the January 2020 issue of the PMLA dedicated to varieties of Digital Humanities (DH), Booth and Posner (2020) describe the “interdisciplinary collaboration,” “technical experimentation,” and the promotion of “public engagement and humanistic knowledge and understanding” that DH offers scholars and practitioners (10). They go on to reflect on the past two decades of research and practice in the expansion of DH through information studies, libraries, and departments of English. In a related manner, it is our intention to provide both an overview of the history of DH in academia generally, and also its applications to the teaching of Russian language and culture, in particular, examining several past and current DH projects in Russian-related areas. In so doing, we strive to create a portrait of DH within the historic context of academic inquiry with the aim of demonstrating its robust applicability to Russian language and cultural studies. Finally, any contemporary portrait of DH—or any other frame for scholarship and teaching—must necessarily address issues of intersectionality and equity in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic access. Thus, we also discuss models of DH applications that serve in the amelioration of constraints on student access to certain types of programs of study, such as education abroad and contact with native speakers of Russian.

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The rapid growth of DH over the past two decades has forced scholars to reconsider and reconfigure the very nature of academic research across a wide range of scholarly disciplines that include not only the traditional humanities subject areas, but also the arts, social sciences, and pedagogy, as well. As Berry (2011) contends: “It is becoming more and more evident that research [in the academy] is increasingly being mediated through digital technology. Many argue that this mediation is slowly beginning to change what it means to undertake research, affecting both the epistemologies and ontologies that underlie a research program” (1). Thus, any prospective research agenda, whether in linguistics, teaching and learning, literary and cultural studies, text mining, or cognition studies, can be pursued under the umbrella of DH.

2. Reflections on DH and schools of thought
Simply combining the terms “digital” and “humanities” generates a vast array of DH categories. Within the range of definitions of DH currently available, as suggested by Kirsch (2014), one can distinguish both a minimalist and a maximalist understanding of the term. In the narrower minimalist sense, DH is defined as the “application of computer technology to traditional scholarly functions, such as the editing of texts” (Kirsch 2014, 1), or the compilation of an archive of related humanistic artifacts. An example of such a compilation would be Jerome J. McGann’s (2008) Rossetti’s Archive, an on-line repository of texts and images related to the career of the poet and artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti. While a useful bibliographic and visual repository, this type of resource makes relatively minimal usage of the capabilities of digital presentation and intervention of the individual documents represented in the project.

Proponents of the maximalist approach to DH, however, postulate that a paradigm shift in the humanities has occurred, and the very substance, not just the medium, of humanistic work has changed. Such a position is taken by Schnapp and Presner (2015), who provide the following definition, as well as a new moniker, for a new generation of DH products: DH 2.0. In their DH “manifesto,” they posit:

Digital Humanities is not a unified field but an array of convergent practices that explore a universe in which: a) print is no longer the exclusive or the normative medium in which knowledge is produced and/or disseminated; instead, print finds itself absorbed into new, multimedia configurations; and b) digital tools, techniques, and media have altered the production and dissemination of knowledge in the arts, human and social science (182).
Such a maximalist approach to DH confronts systems of knowledge production and dissemination within the humanities, social science, and their intersection. DH currently incorporates both digitized and born-digital materials. The field covers a variety of topics, from curating online collections to data mining large cultural data sets. DH also intersects with information science as well as media theory and game studies, specifically in areas related to DH project design and production.

The multitude of existing definitions of DH reflects the tension within the philosophical underpinnings of DH, which basically combine the seemingly disparate fields of humanities and technology. Within the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, technology is usually considered the domain of the natural sciences. The “intrusion” of technology and its applications into the social sciences -- and especially into the humanities – creates a serious paradigm shift in the conceptual tissue of this field.

The inspiration of the DH research methods is usually drawn from two major epistemological schools: the interpretivist and the postpositivist. Both schools are reactions against the positivist philosophical approach to knowledge. “As a philosophy, positivism is in accordance with the empiricist view that knowledge stems from human experience.” (Collins 2018, 38). In other words, the key approach to positivist research methods is the experiment, one which employs a large set of data, highly structured protocols, and quantitative tools. Historically, the positivist research methodology has been used in natural sciences such as physics, chemistry, and biology. The epistemological foundation of the positivist philosophy is that the knowledge is objective and resides in the world outside of human consciousness.

Interpretivism, however, is “associated with the philosophical position of idealism, and is used to group together diverse approaches, including social constructivism, phenomenology and hermeneutics; approaches that reject the objectivist view that meaning resides within the world independently of consciousness” (Collins 2018, 38). Development of interpretivist philosophy is based on the critique of positivism in social sciences. Accordingly, interpretivist philosophy emphasizes qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis. Interpretivist methodology is an umbrella term for qualitative methods historically employed in humanities research, such as case studies, grounded theory, critical discourse analysis, ethnographic research, and focus groups research.

The postpositivistic paradigm that emerged as a reaction to the positivist methodology promotes a mixed methodology approach that employs both qualitative and quantitative methods and explores the
diversity of facts through various investigative lenses. In other words, postpositivist philosophy and research methodology combine both positivist and interpretivist approaches into one unified interdisciplinary practice. The ontological position of interpretivism is relativism. “Relativism is the view that reality is subjective and differs from person to person” (Guba and Lincoln 1994, 110).

Thus, postpositivist and relativist epistemological foundations are combined in DH inquiry systems, and qualitative and quantitative methods are synthetized, as well. More precisely, quantitative methods are now used to solve humanistic problems that are relativist at their core. This approach is a revolt against the limitations of positivism in which positivism solely associates itself with empiricism and rejects the existence of an individual or subjective perspective of facts. The research questions and practices with which DH engages are complex and interdependent. They require interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers, fields, and, in many cases, institutions. DH provides unprecedented technological tools for such collaborations that can potentially bring together knowledge and expertise from around the world. The beauty of DH is in the decentralization and “democratization” of knowledge and the access to it, a point discussed further below. How DH emerged in the middle of the 20th century to become an integral part of academic inquiry and teaching in the 2020s helps to understand more fully current contributions of DH to the field of Russian and Russian studies.

3. A brief history of DH
The use of computers in humanities started more than seventy years ago and, according to Hockey (2004), “unlike many other interdisciplinary experiments, humanities computing has a very well-known beginning” (3). In 1949, an Italian Jesuit priest, Father Roberto Busa, began indexing all the words in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, which total about eleven million words of medieval Latin. He thought that computers might help him in this monumental task and went to meet Thomas J. Watson, the founder of IBM, in the United States. With IBM’s assistance, all of Aquinas’s works were transferred to punched cards and a concordance program was written to perform text searches within the massive corpus of works. The project was completed thirty years later and eventually comprised fifty-six printed volumes of the Index Thomisticus. “A CD-ROM of the Aquinas material appeared in 1992 that incorporated some hyper-textual features (‘cum hypertextibus’) and was accompanied by a user guide in Latin, English,
and Italian” (Hockey 2004, 4). Thus, Father Roberto Busa was a pioneer in the use of computers for linguistic textual indexing, and his work is now considered one of the formative underpinnings of informatics and an early exemplar of DH.

In 1998, decades after the publication of the Index Thomisticus, Father Busa was awarded a prize by the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO) to honor the epic achievement and the commencement of the field of computing in the humanities. The award later became known as the Roberto Busa Prize and is given every three years to outstanding DH scholars in recognition of their lifetime achievements. The 1960s also saw the first conference on humanities computing organized by IBM in 1964, as well as the founding of the journal Computers and the Humanities in 1996 under the editorship of Joseph Raben, which signaled further development of the emerging field (Hockey 2004, 7).

Advancements in the field of DH can be seen in the Brown University Intermedia project on hypertext in the 1980s. Hypertext allows the organization of a text in a fundamentally new way and employs a multi-layered approach to text representation. Hypertext can develop very complex and dynamic systems of linking and cross-referencing elements of a text not constrained to be linear. The idea of hypertext became foundational for the creation of the World Wide Web (WWW), which is the most extensive and the most well-known example of hypertext implementation. The WWW and first web browser were written in 1990 and released on the Internet in 1991. That event signified a totally new approach to humanities scholarship and a starting point of the first iteration of DH (Schnapp, Presner, and Lunenfield 2009). From that point on, texts, static images, documents, and video and audio media that were previously available only in print, on linear tape media, floppy discs, or “live” presentations could now be posted and accessed online, which presented new opportunities for research and in humanities.

However, in the 1990s and early 2000s, “computing” was still often seen as technical support for humanistic studies that focused on large-scale digitization projects and on the establishment of a related technological infrastructure. Berry (2011) contends, “The first wave of digital humanities

2 The history of hypertext itself is complicated and intriguing. The word hypertext was coined in the 1960s by Ted Nelson, who later started the Xanadu project, which tried to store all of human knowledge in a massive database of information. The project did not succeed, but the underlying idea was very powerful. Nelson saw computers as a tool that could reorganize human knowledge and inquiry in an interconnected nonlinear way.
work was quantitative, mobilizing the search and retrieval powers of the database, automating corpus linguistics, and stacking hypercards into critical arrays” (3). Such an approach corresponds closely to the minimalist definition of DH discussed above.

The terminological change from “Humanities Computing” to “Digital Humanities” has been attributed to Susan Schriebman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth who, as the original editors for the Blackwell *Companion to Digital Humanities* (2004), tried to represent a much more complex and productive field that involved more than simply digitizing documents and providing tools to conduct research in the humanities. Changing to the term DH signified that the field “had emerged … into a genuinely intellectual endeavor with its own professional practices, rigorous standards, and exciting theoretical explorations” (Hayles 2011, 24). DH quickly became the accepted moniker for both the humanistic research and scholarship conducted using digital technology, as well as for the emerging methodologies for undertaking these studies. Equivalent terms quickly were adopted in most European languages: “Las Humanidades digitales” in Spanish, “Les digital humanities” in French, “die digitalen Geisteswissenschaften” in German, and “Цифровые гуманитарные науки” in Russian. In her overview of DH in Russia, Garshkova (2014) emphasized the need to merge new technologies with new methodologies if the DH movement was to be successful, stating “Information support of humanities research in the digital age cannot be limited to just providing an IT infrastructure; it has to offer methodological, technological, software, computational and educational components that users can interact with online” (5-6).

In the last twenty-five years, DH has undergone a transition from the pre- to the postparadigm period in the development of a scientific field, in the broader sense of the Kuhnian term *paradigm*. Before a paradigm shift can occur, a number of schools compete for the domination of a given field. Afterward, in the wake of some notable scientific achievement, the number of schools is greatly reduced, ordinarily to one, and a more efficient mode of scientific practice begins (Kuhn 1970, 178). Such was the case for DH in the 2010s; DH in the 2020s continues to undergo a paradigm shift that informs the forms and functions of “DH 2.0.”

4. DH 2.0: The current state of DH
In 2006, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) launched the Digital Humanities Initiative, which made the use of the term *digital humanities* widespread in the United States. According to Schnapp and
Presner (2015), “the second wave [of DH] is qualitative, interpretive, experiential, emotive, generative in character” (116). During the initial period of the development of DH, the “humanities” component was “weighted” more in terms of research methodology, and humanities scholars were driving the studies. However, DH 2.0 introduces entirely new hybrid methodologies that are not often derived from the humanities per se. As Berry (2011) argues, “The question of quite how the digital humanities undertake their research, and whether the notions of first and second wave digital humanities capture the current state of different working practices and methods in the digital humanities, remains contested” (4).

The DH practices and methods Berry (2011) refers to include, among others, text analysis, creation of searchable corpora, online publication, production of multimedia sets of images, text, and sound, and even more recent innovations such as crowdsourcing, the collection of data by requesting the input of a large number of online users. Other practices used in DH include programs to search for and identify patterns in texts, for annotating texts, images, and sounds, and for creating and managing online content for analysis. Such practices facilitate inquiry and study of material that would be difficult, if not impossible, without the tools of digital technology As Volodin (2014) comments: «По сути, современные цифровые гуманитарные науки предполагают широкую исследовательскую программу, которая включает вопросы, интересующие любого гуманитария, так как цифровые исследовательские практики – это реальность любого ученого.» [“In fact, modern digital humanities involve a broad research agenda that includes questions of interest to any humanities researcher, since digital research practices are the reality of any scholar”] (10).

Thus, with the second wave of DH in the mid-2000s, the “digital” component started to weigh more than the humanistic one. That development produced some epistemic changes to the inquiry systems in the field. For instance, the digital tools revealed inconsistencies and allowed the interrogation of some assumptions that are implicit to humanistic research, e.g., authorship, canon formation, periodization, and others. A recent digital analysis of Syriac scripts revealed some significant inconsistencies in previous scripts classifications. “This digital paleography project uses ancient manuscripts written in the Aramaic dialect of Syriac as a case study for exploring how recent advances in the digital analysis of handwriting can help scholars better ascertain a manuscript’s provenance ... and trace out the chronological development of ancient scripts” (Stanford 2018, 6). The Automated Scribal Identification Project began in 2010 and was a
collaborative research project of Stanford University, Smith College, Duke University, and other institutions. The initial project results were revealed in 2018 and showed that the methodology for “how scholars have classified Syriac script for the last thousand years is simply dead wrong” and “that the chronological estimates in library catalogues upon which most modern scholarship depends are often in error” (Stanford 2018, 6).

DH tools can also help explain centuries-old questions and offer new insights into their solutions. Such an example would be the recent discovery of a two-thousand-year-old literary papyrus which has been housed in Basel, Switzerland since the sixteenth century and “was regarded until now as unique in the world of papyrology” (Kantrowitz 2018). The Basel Digital Humanities Lab used ultraviolet and infrared images to determine that this two-thousand-year-old document comprised several layers of papyrus glued together. One of the sheets was a literary papyrus which was a “sensational discovery, ... as the majority of papyri are documents such as letters, contracts and receipts” (Kantrowitz 2018). Huebner hopes to further the papyrus research through sharing the digitalized Basel papyrus collection with international databases as “people mentioned in a Basel papyrus text may appear again in other papyri, housed for example in Strasbourg, London, Berlin or other locations” (Kantrowitz 2018). As we can see from the previous examples, the medium of delivery and dissemination of information in the digital format has changed the landscape of DH. New software products are increasingly shaping the field as they create new ways of undertaking tasks, transforms social and economic relations, and offers new modes of inquiry. The question arises as to whether “software studies” represent a legitimate area of research in the humanities. Fuller (2008) succinctly expresses this lack of a suitable theoretical framework for integrating new software into the work of DH: “The very material of software has often been left invisible .... The growing importance of software requires a new kind of cultural theory that can understand the politics of pixels or the poetry of a loop and engage in the microanalysis of everyday digital objects” (3).

While some scholars decry the loss of the skills and techniques of older research traditions, others have embraced the new way of conducting research in the humanities. Clearly at this point DH is experiencing a Kuhnian revolutionary period which is reflected even in the titles of current articles and books dedicated to the field, e.g., Transformative Digital Humanities: Challenges and Opportunities (Balkun and Deyrup 2020),
Digital Humanities and New Ways of Teaching (Wing-bo Tso 2019), Debates in Digital Humanities (Gold and Klein 2019), Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0 (Presner 2009), and others. As Presner (2009) contends, “We are in … the midst of a transformation of the institutional and conceptual conditions of possibility for the generation, transmission, accessibility, and preservation of knowledge” (114).

One of the main goals of DH is the democratization of knowledge through commitment to open standards, open sources, and collaboration that transcend established disciplinary and institutional boundaries, including commons-based peer collaboration, as well as the collaboration of trained scholars and general public. As Schapp and Presner (2015) succinctly state: “Digital Humanities = Co-creation. Because of the complexity of Big Humanities projects, teamwork, specialized roles within teams, and ‘production’ standards that imply specialization become defining features of the digital turn in the human sciences” (186).

Such transformation requires a serious change in the mindset of the scientific community which consists of the practitioners of specific specialty who know “what the world is like” (Kuhn 1970, 5). Those beliefs and assumptions represent the core of a scientific field, and any disruptions or abnormalities threaten the belief system established in that particular field of science. “Normal science … often suppresses fundamental novelties because they are necessarily subversive of its basic commitments” (Kuhn 1970, 5). We can trace a similar trend with the emergence of DH in the academy as a new discipline in its own right.

Jaschik (2012) states, “faculty members in humanities disciplines have been pioneers in many forms of digital scholarship and teaching” (1); however, there is a great deal of resistance to new methods of inquiry and “some senior scholars are downright hostile to it” (1). That hostility has had a serious impact on DH scholarship, since its products initially were

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3 One Internet “folk hero” who advocated to make many web-based digital files free and open to the public was Aaron Swartz. A self-made millionaire by the age of 19, he co-organized Reddit (a social news site), Creative Commons, and web.py, among others. Swartz also tried to give free access to scholars to scientific and literary journals by downloading 4.8 million articles and documents, nearly the entire library, from JSTOR, a subscription-only service. Although JSTOR did not press charges, he was indicted on federal charges of wire fraud and computer fraud. Swartz committed suicide in 2013 at the age of 26. He was posthumously inducted to the Internet Hall of Fame that same year.

4 Normal science is “the activity in which most scientists inevitably spend almost all their time, is predicated on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like” (Kuhn, 1970,5).
not taken into consideration for tenure promotions in U.S. universities. The resistance to recognizing DH research methods and their findings as “legitimate” in the academy might be partially attributed to their novel departure from accepted research norms. Indeed, some DH methods, such as digital ethnographies, are adapted from the traditional methods in humanities and social science research, while others, “such as the translation of literary sources into digital games, are ‘native’ to Digital Humanities and digital technologies” (Levenberg, et al., 2018, 1). The latter methods might be especially misunderstood by the academicians used to the interpretivist and introspective research approach in humanities.

In a 2011 talk entitled “Who’s In and Who’s Out” at the Modern Language Association (MLA) annual convention, Steven Ramsay, a specialist in programming languages, controversially argued that DH involves moving from reading and critiquing to building and making, invoking the rise of media studies, game studies, critical code studies (Ramsey 2013). The question then arises whether, for example, creating a game based on a literary work or developing a ground-breaking software program that results in a fundamental discovery in humanities might be considered as academic work toward promotion with tenure? Endres (2017) succinctly summarizes this quandary: “Building faces the challenge of not being writing,” but then goes on to argue, “However, the commonalities between writing and building far exceed their differences” (44).

The acceptance of DH in the academia in general and philology in particular took a large step forward during the 2009 MLA convention, at which DH was hailed as “the first ‘next big thing’ in a long time” (Pannapacker 2009, 1), and guidelines for evaluating digital scholarship in the humanities were articulated. These guidelines, originally drafted in 2000, were revised and approved by the MLA Committee on Information Technology in January 2012 and tried to address the newly articulated concerns of both parties involved: “traditional” and DH scholars. In particular, the guidelines appeal to those working in digital media to explain “the results, theoretical underpinnings, and intellectual rigor of their work” (MLA 2012). They also stipulate that DH scholars should be “prepared to be held accountable to the same extent that faculty members

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in other fields are for showing the relevance of their work in terms of the traditional areas of teaching, research, and service” (MLA 2012).

The MLA Guidelines also stress the importance of the engagement of “qualified reviewers” in the assessment of DH projects; that is, researchers who produce digital work “should be evaluated by persons ... who are knowledgeable about the use and creation of digital media in a given faculty member’s field” (MLA 2012). Given the transdisciplinary nature of DH, “at times this may be possible only by engaging qualified reviewers from other departments, divisions, or institutions” (MLA 2012). Another important principle for evaluating DH research is the “respect to medium specificity”; that is “born-digital and Web-based projects ... should be viewed in electronic form, not in print” (MLA 2012).

The MLA guidelines helped raise the legitimacy of DH and increased its visibility, which in turn helped to secure funding for new DH projects. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, for example, as part of its General Archives Digital Collections initiative, has funded several DH projects in the past several years, including a two-million-dollar award both to the University of Pennsylvania “to continue to support digital humanities training and research for students, faculty, and surrounding institutional partners,” and to the University of Maryland at College Park “to continue to support an integrated research and training model at the intersection of digital humanities and African American studies” (Mellon Foundation, n.d.). In 2020, the Foundation awarded another two-million-dollar grant to the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, “to support the development and implementation of the General Archives Digital Collections initiative” (Mellon Foundation, n.d.).

DH is unquestionably moving from being an “emerging” research field towards becoming an “established” research field in the academy. A number of U.S. universities, including Loyola University Chicago, Stanford University, New York University, UCLA, Brigham Young University, and others offer courses and degree programs in DH. The field is supported by a number of organizations under the umbrella of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO), which “promotes and supports digital research and teaching across all arts and humanities disciplines, acting as a community-based advisory force, and supporting excellence in research, publication, collaboration and training” (ADHO, n.d.). The alliance funds various projects, such as the Text Encoding Initiative, an extensive
consortium that develops and sets standards for the representation of texts in digital form, as well as producing the most prominent journal in the field, *Digital Humanities Quarterly*. The ADHO also sponsors an international Digital Humanities conference which is held annually. An international network of DH institutions, centerNet, was founded in 2007 and has over 200 members from nearly 100 centers in nineteen countries. The goal of this organization is to promote global collaboration in the field of DH by connecting centers around the world for sharing expertise and joining forces for project development. Another goal of centerNet is to nurture a new generation of “hybrid scholars” or “alternative academics” who work in staff positions that combine service and research components. The new centerNet publication, DHCommons, has recently merged with Arts-Humanities.net in order “to create one large-scale discovery and review publication for digital humanities projects” (centerNet, n.d.), which aids in the dissemination, review, and recognition of DH projects.

5. DH and Russian studies
DH projects in Russian studies, since 2010, have emerged prominently both in the U.S. and internationally. Conferences, symposia, and individual web-based projects featured research and development DH projects that supported the teaching/learning of Russian language, literature, and cultural studies. A public Facebook group, “Digital Humanities for the Slavic Field,” was created in October 2012. The social media site provides an international virtual forum for scholars and practitioners in the Slavic field to present and discuss digital projects and research and, at the time of this writing, has over 1,300 active members. One of the first global conferences on DH, entitled “Cultural Research in the Context of Digital Humanities,” took place October 3-5, 2013 at the Russian State Herzen University in St. Petersburg. The conference call for papers both offered an extensive definition of DH and proposed topics, such as on archival, museum, and library projects as well as literary and cultural studies. Most striking, though, was the following statement, which underscored the novel quality of DH and the inherent uneasiness of some scholars to embrace DH: “Digital humanities do not reject or replace traditional landscape of humanities, but become a superstructure over it. The border between scholars, who do not take the world of digital culture into consideration and those, who are already used to it, becomes clearer” (“International Conference”). This relatively early attempt in Russia to reach scholars less familiar with DH media and methods and to create a forum for collegial discourse with those already working in digital media provided an important base for
legitimizing DH in the Russian academy.

The year 2015 was particularly significant for DH projects specifically focused on Russian language, literature, and culture in the U.S. Two major university-based conferences, both held in April of that year, focused on the growing research in and the development of Russian studies and DH. The first, “Russian Formalism and the Digital Humanities,” was held at Stanford University. The conference featured presentations both by DH pioneers—such as Franco Moretti and Glen Worthey, who, respectively, opened and closed the Stanford conference—as well as by US philologists and literary scholars of Russian Formalism. While some participants “questioned whether it would be possible for these two subfields or modes of analysis to come together” (Bozovic 2015), the conference initiated an important conversation concerning the place of philology in DH endeavors.

During the same month, at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, a talk by Igor Plishchikov from Moscow State University’s Institute for World Culture, entitled “Classical Russian Literature and Digital Humanities (University of Wisconsin–Madison 2015),” brought attention to the innovations of digital libraries and collections of texts of classical Russian literature and folklore. Plishchikov demonstrated the functional capabilities of these digital collections (information search and retrieval) and modes of text presentation (text, image, text + image), as well as via other recently available digital reference tools. The talk introduced students and faculty of Russian to the utility and efficiency of digital tools and research methods in Russian philology, demonstrating applications of new technology to the organization and study of literary texts.

Other DH projects at US universities began to demonstrate the efficacy of digital resources and programs in the study of Russian language and culture. One such project was developed at UCLA in 2014, an undergraduate course called “Big Data and Big Novels: Text Mining the Prose of the Russian Revolution,” under the auspices of their Center for Digital Humanities. According to website for the project, “The course aims to teach undergraduate students not only traditional literacy (critical thinking, argumentation, writing) but technological literacy as well (programming, text mining—or the gleaning of information by finding patterns in a text, data visualization)” (UCLA Center for Digital Humanities 2014). Students in the course examined Pasternak’s Doctor Zhivago, Bulgakov’s Master and Margarita, and Zamyatin’s We as the primary texts for the course; in addition to traditional literary analysis of these novels, student also developed
relevant technological skills and learned to apply data sets to humanistic studies and beyond.

A second project, merging course development and an academic conference, is an ambitious initiative at Yale University called “Avant-Gardes and Émigrés.” This research- and teaching-based project that “explores the close relationship between avant-garde aesthetics and Formalist theory, and the dissemination and evolution of interpretive practices through emigration, including the formation of many departments of Slavic Languages and Literatures in the United States” (“Avant-Gardes”). The project team comprises both faculty and graduate students in Slavic Studies and attempts to engage this collaborative in examining texts, documents, and data using tools of the digital age. As Marieta Bozovic (2015) states:

Done well, DH demands self-awareness about method, data, sources, and bias. In many literary and media disciplines, the boundary between truth claims (author X wrote a letter to Y in 1957) and interpretation fluctuates with theoretical fashion and goes unremarked: in a room of ten literary scholars, we are likely to find as many working definitions of “evidence.” It is invaluable to learn to actively negotiate a position for one’s own research within that room, above all at the graduate level. (8)

Both of these projects unquestionably exemplify the power and potential of DH initiatives to engage scholars and students with Russian-language materials, but they also demonstrate the increased access to these materials – whether they are rare, archived, distant, or all of these – to an ever-wider audience. This audience can potentially include more students with diverse intersectional identities, including race, ethnicity, and gender, because of the inherently inclusive nature of DH’s technological base.

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, one such example of the inclusive power of DH in Slavic studies emerged as a result of the lockdown through the fall academic term. A consortium of three minority-serving universities, Howard University, the University of Arizona, and the University of Puerto Rico, received funding from the U.S. Russia Foundation to connect students at these institutions with one another and working professionals in government, academic and nonprofit careers. The original proposal including participation in an annual Slavic conference and a capstone trip to Russia for the student participants. Once grounded, however, the program was reimagined as a DH project. Small teams of students worked virtually with faculty mentors at U.S. institutions on projects that were presented at the online American Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) conference. These projects were then reworked into digital presentations that are now housed on a
server at Howard University, and comprise the first installation of minority students’ perspectives in Russian and Slavic studies. Projects such as this demonstrate that DH applications in Russian/Slavic studies can both energize and revitalize research efforts in language, literature, and culture, as well as engage a new and inclusive generation of scholars in collaborative projects using new technologies to conduct research in our field.

6. DH, Russian, and social responsibility
Advances in educational technology and increasing Internet access, both sine qua non for DH, are significant parts of what Kramsch (2019) argues is “the urge to embrace globalization and thus dismantle the traditionally national underpinnings of FL education” (53). She goes on to describe how computer-based digital instruction “serves to individualized learning according to learners’ interests, learning styles, modality preferences, and schedule availability” (53). The student-centered, socially conscious, and access-aware qualities of tech-assisted instruction and digitized resources increase participation of ever-broader profiles of learners and researchers in world languages, including Russian, and move toward the acquisition of what Reagan and Osborn (2020) call “emancipatory knowledge” (190). Such a critical pedagogy should be at the core of all of DH projects, as their potential reach goes far beyond any individual classroom or institution at which they were developed.

As the recent collaborative DH project of minority-serving institutions mentioned above demonstrates, one benefit of DH in the sphere of Russian language and studies for students is the promotion of equity through the creation of more accessible digital ecologies that can provide greater, wider access to resources and materials that would otherwise only be available only to those with the financial means to travel abroad. While there is no question that an immersion experience abroad provides students of Russian with transformative experiences in the service of increased linguistic and cultural competence, inequities in access to these opportunities is too often encountered by students with limited financial resources, or those of nonwhite ethnicity or race.

As 2018-19 data from the Institute of International Education (IIE) indicate, the total number of US students studying abroad—including those in world language programs—increased by 1.6 percent over the preceding year; however, the total number studying abroad (347,099 students) still represents only 1.8 percent all students enrolled in U.S. postsecondary institutions (IIE 2020). Of that number, only 31% of participants identified as nonwhite and, as the Association of International Educators (NAFSA)
remarks, “Although the diversity of study abroad participation has increased in recent years, minority students are still greatly underrepresented in study abroad programs” (NAFSA, n.d.). Abraham (2018) echoes this contention, citing cost and family situations as the primary reasons for lack of participation and, consequently, lack of diversity in U.S. study abroad programs.

In spite of the inherent inequities in access to many programs abroad, this disparity among participating students should not preclude those who are eligible from enjoying many of the benefits of study abroad, nor should it deprive them of the spontaneous interaction and authentic contact with the language and culture that “culminates in a transformative learning experience” (Garza 2021, 91). While we must also guard against further isolating underrepresented populations with domestic alternatives to study abroad, judicious, thoughtful, and mediated programs and courses that utilize media-based technology as part of a broader curriculum of language and culture instruction can provide the opportunity for many more learners to engage with the native speakers and authentic in-country materials without the cost of conventional study abroad programs.

The increasing development of DH resources for the study of Russian language and culture provides diverse and intersectional student and scholar populations with domestic, accessible opportunities to experience the benefits of autonomous contact with the source language and culture context, thanks in large part to the development of advanced technologies in communication and information. The growing availability Internet access to populations nationally and globally provides virtual alternatives to study and research abroad and affordable and efficacious means to benefit from contact and interaction with Russian in authentic, though virtual, environments. DH projects, constructed environments utilizing interactive media, provide users with access to virtual environments, materials, and interlocutors that once were only available through study abroad.

7. DH and virtual Russian-language resources
In order to engage with DH projects and take advantage of their resources, most digital natives of Generation Z are already fully familiar with the capacities and capabilities of Web 2.0; however, for DH projects that

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7 As of fall 2020, 62 percent of the world’s population has Internet access. In the US, 89 percent of the population reported having access to the internet in 2020 (Accessed on October 15, 2020, https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm).
navigate between US and source materials resident on Russian websites, researchers and students will benefit from some instruction in using Russian-language digital sources. Nemtchinova (2014) and Garza (2017) offer, respectively, two models that use existing web-based interfaces, such as the inquiry-oriented lesson format WebQuest, and created programs, such as Café Russia, to build on the existing internet abilities of learners of Russian and incorporate meaningful authentic content in Russian. These “meta DH” projects simultaneously address cultural literacy through the use of authentic social and literary materials while equipping their users to be better prepared to engage with other DH projects and portals.

The inherently collaborative and social environments of DH projects offer the student of Russian language and culture several pedagogical advantages: (1) by working collaboratively with instructors to learn first how to identify, access, and interact with these online sources, students are able to engage more confidently in authentic environments using Russian-language materials; (2) by creating much more accessible DH environments that create virtual communities that simulate the interactions with individuals and artifacts usually afforded by study abroad experiences, more students are able to reap the advantages of authentic contact in the target language and culture; and (3) by utilizing digital tools and media— even as basic as the simple screenshot, DH can transform the educational experience with “a little-‘d’ democratizing tool available to anyone” (Clark 2020, 206).

Russian language and culture materials—such as the open-source online textbook and curriculum for novice-level Russian, “Между нами” (Comer, deBenedette, and Smyslova 2017) and the Advanced-to Superior-level textbook, Mastering Russian through Global Debate (Brown, et al. 2014), which utilizes online topic research and virtual communication with in-country speaking partners—have made substantial progress in the field’s movement toward fully digital projects in Russian language and culture instruction. Successful projects, such as those found in MIT’s “Course 21G” project in DH and creative pedagogies (MIT Global Languages, n.d.), can serve as useful models for future approaches and articulations of digital world language and culture teaching materials.

8. Russian studies and DH 3.0?
Although the field of DH is still in the process of defining itself in the greater realm of humanistic studies, it has gained considerable recognition both in the academy and in public life. It is fairly clear that humanities
research and teaching, including in Russian, will continue within the framework of digital inquiry and that the divide between the “two cultures,” (i.e., quantitative and qualitative) has finally been bridged. We need to acknowledge that DH draws on both positivist and interpretivist epistemic traditions and that finding common ground is not always trivial. In the words of Burdick, et al. (2012): “Contemporary DH stands not in opposition to the past, but on its shoulders. It honors the pioneering labors carried out over the past seven decades, ... as it seeks to move beyond repository building and editing to new synthetic practices” (122). In the coming years, as more innovative DH projects focus on Russian studies and the teaching and learning of Russian language and culture emerge, this move toward the creation of interdisciplinary and intersectional materials will unquestionably be evidenced.

For the more socially conscious classrooms of the 2020s, DH offers both scholars and students greater opportunities for applying critical pedagogies and creating more equitable virtual environments to encourage, if not ensure, greater equity and access to the opportunities that studying Russian language and culture provides. As we witness the shift in the demographic composition in the US academy and acknowledge the persistence of bias and lack of equity in these institutions, we can better understand the profound role that DH can play in ameliorating access to and facilitating the benefits from online digital projects. Whether in the area of teaching and learning, linguistic analysis, or cultural studies, DH projects are based on a delicate balance between computational methods and the humanistic nature of the subject matter. Booth and Posner (2020) presciently note in their remarks on the future of DH in humanistic academic endeavors: “In that hypothetical future in which this issue [of the PMLA] represents a kind of screenshot of DH before the changes to come, we may find that our robotic avatars are speaking a different language” (21). Whether that avatar’s language is Russian or some other world language, DH will certainly play a substantial role in the linguistic and cultural preparation of the next generation of language and area specialists.

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