

INSTITUTE FOR DIGITAL ARTS & HUMANITIES: RESPONSE TO 2020 EXTERNAL REVIEW

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We are grateful to the reviewers for their careful assessment, and to OVPR, who navigated the review process in a virtual environment in such a way that would elicit constructive feedback despite the challenges that may come with a remote review.

INTRODUCTION & FRAMING

To recap information conveyed in our self-study and interviews with external reviewers, the Institute for Digital Arts & Humanities' (IDAH) organizational and philosophical approach to supporting the digital arts & humanities is very much informed by the long view. Our modest staff and operational budget led us to establish a “bootstrap” approach to digital arts & humanities work, impacting the broadest possible audience with accessible, scaffolded opportunities for skill acquisition, project growth, and publication. Our overarching goals are to foster widespread digital arts & humanities adoption, selectively collaborate on projects to raise IDAH's research profile, and promote our affiliates' research successes as our center's research successes.

REFLECTIONS ON IMPACT

We drew on a number of DH center development models to inform IDAH's initial restructuring in 2017. As we drafted IDAH's 2017-2020 plan, we noted for ourselves, but perhaps less explicitly for OVPR, the fact that a number of DH centers with which we were both familiar have gone through periods of highly visible external-grant activity driven by a few close affiliates, only to contract and lose sight of their mission. These centers and their missions were negatively impacted as they struggled to maintain funding, and as faculty partners whose visions and grants were central to the center moved to other projects or even other institutions.

Our goal was to manage our growth by balancing grants acquisition (which helps fund the center but also requires focused support for those externally funded projects) with a broad training/mentoring/ambassadorial approach (that allows for the involvement of many affiliates and more stable, longer-term, growth potential but requires significant investment of personnel time up front). We envisioned this model as largely independent of the identities of the directors themselves, but with room for each director to focus the center's programming given

our respective expertise, in order to provide long-term stability and an easily identifiable mission for IDAH regardless of who was at its helm. The external review notes that the focus on the many stages of project development, rather than only externally funded projects, is IDAH's strength, and they caution against buying too heavily into the former, pointing out some of the very same center contractions that resulted from over-reliance on soft-funding models that worried us initially. To quote comments from members of IDAH's Policy Committee as summarized by Dr. Eric Sandweiss (History), we recognize our unique strengths and seek grant opportunities that reflect those strengths:

“The reviewers have identified our campus-wide community-building model as one of our unique traits, and we are pleased by their recognition of our efforts in this direction. To the extent that we need to focus on drawing more external support to the institute, we propose to do so based on the distinctive niche that we occupy among digital humanities centers—to show funders how our breadth of partnerships and capacity-building relationships builds long-term excellence in the digital humanities in a way that differs from our peer institutions.”

We also acknowledge the need for IDAH to make its voice heard in the national conversation. Our first effort in that vein has been to focus on grants that we can use to build both the community support and IDAH-internal skills that are necessary to administer external grants. Our second effort has been in internal project prototype development in service of external visibility, through both graduate and faculty fellowships. We aim to expand the number of faculty whose expertise positions them to pursue external grant funding more effectively with some support from IDAH but a less intensive focus, and we want to train graduate students who will eventually leave IU but take IDAH's philosophy and approaches into the larger arts and humanities ecosystem. The third of those efforts is just coming to fruition; after three years of audience development and data collection on our own practices, we now have a set of practices oriented toward sustaining digital humanities research on which we can publish. The first move toward publication was a submission to an international conference on the IDAH pipeline model; it was accepted in May of 2020 and will be part of a virtual conference stream in late October and published proceedings. We plan to extend the conference presentation and prepare it for submission to a digital humanities journal in early 2021.

While not totally separate from the issue of local versus national impact, the breadth of IDAH's mission is also one we've sought to address from the beginning of our co-directorship. Collaborations with campus partners—the College ASURE program, CRRES, and the SSRC to name a few—help us maintain a focus on research as the end goal of our programming while acknowledging that deep-dive digital-humanities research is often not the first thing our

affiliates have in mind when they initially come into IDAH's orbit. As we move forward, our goal will be to seek additional partnerships and forms of support that align with our teaching-as-gateway-to-research mission and that expand our research opportunities to a broader set of IUB community members, including UGS, several career centers on campus, and an expanded partnership with the ASURE and intensive-first-year-seminar programs. Particularly with regard to this last goal, we aim to incorporate some research work with undergraduates, who much like graduate students will take their IDAH training outside of IU and whose numbers will allow us to have more impact on a longer-term basis.

The questions around impact shape the remainder of our responses, with input from members of IDAH's Policy Committee, and are focused on the external review recommendations for the resources and practices that will help us reshape IDAH in the next 3 years and, we hope, inform our ongoing mission for the decade to come.

NEEDS & ACTION ITEMS MOVING FORWARD

The reviewers highlighted several recommendations. We have selected the following as higher-priority needs that will have a positive, longer-term impact on IDAH.

Staffing is one of the primary issues we face, both in the short and the long term. We expect that our full-time staffing needs will outpace overhead from external grants, and we are also aware that external grants may bring in overhead that might encourage us (perhaps wrongly) to expand too soon or too quickly. As a consequence, staffing considerations will be one of our key focal points for center sustainability. We have several programs in place that needed individual attention from the directors initially but which are now solid enough to be supported by well-trained but less experienced staff. The issue here is that our staffing is almost entirely done by graduate assistants who cycle every 1-2 years and thus require the full attention of the directors for a full semester of training and then significant support for an additional semester. This training is a valuable part of spreading IDAH's expertise and reputation beyond the walls of IDAH by way of a, thus far, very successful graduate placement rate; at the same time, it is also enormously time-consuming. The **addition of a full-time position for select program management, consultation management** (which we see—as did the external reviewers—as a key conduit for digital arts & humanities support), **training development, and focused support for fellows' research programs** would allow us to 1) continue training GAs for both IDAH support and for post-IDAH placement, 2) support affiliates at all stages of their projects through consulting, and 3) provide research support for faculty fellows as they seek external grant funding. It would also free the directors to consider longer-

term goals in many of the other areas highlighted by the reviewers. The positive contributions of this position are described in more detail in the section below that addresses director workloads.

Director workloads and evaluations in their home departments are a second area of consideration. The emphasis IDAH places on service and teaching as a gateway to effective and creative digital-methods research and artistic activity is a direct result of our evaluative criteria outside of IDAH, and the reviewers note how important that has been to our success thus far. We have each woven our research into the fabric of IDAH's center life as well as our departmental promotion packets with reasonable success, but the occasional comment that we are a research center without research faculty at the helm means we also need to amplify the publication and research work that we do individually in order to effectively communicate the spectrum of IDAH's innovation in research. Following the discussion above regarding staffing, we propose the creation of a two-year postdoctoral position in the short term (2021-2022) that would effectively serve as a full-time Assistant/Associate Director for IDAH. Longer-term, this postdoctoral position would become a full-time academic position. With an Assistant/Associate Director focusing on our successful local programs, this would free up the Directors to be more outward-facing in order to connect our local programs to national programs, devise robust funding development initiatives, bolster IDAH's creative and research profile, and explore new programs in response to national digital arts and humanities trends, all while ensuring our local programs continue to run successfully.

Space is a third issue. In response to our limited staff, we rely heavily on partnerships and collaborations with other centers and with the libraries in particular. As such it is most beneficial to be physically co-located with library professionals, whose work provides key digital-methods, scholarly communications and data-management expertise. The libraries also host other IDAH partners like CITL and the UITS 3D Lab, which makes this co-location particularly advantageous. Our current open-office space works well for the GA training environment, but many of our other spaces—consulting, workshops, exhibit space, etc.—are on loan, as it were, from other divisions. Two options present themselves: with the Arts & Humanities Council moving, there will be additional space very near IDAH's existing offices, which IDAH did have access to in the years between 2008 and 2016. This would give our staff more work space, but will also allow us to hold smaller seminars, ad-hoc consultations, etc. Additionally, the opening of Maxwell Hall offers the opportunity for satellite space, as well as presentation, performance, and artist exhibition spaces that would increase IDAH's presence on campus beyond the Wells Library. Both extending IDAH's work space (much needed) and leveraging other spaces on campus are particularly relevant for the current three-year cycle of

our director appointments. The reviewers also emphasized the need for a space that cultivates a sense of artistic and scholarly community and a strong IDAH identity. Currently we do not have the space or staffing structure in place to encourage connections generated by “drop-ins” or “collaborative lab environments.” Once we are able to shore up our staffing, we would like to envision a more public-facing IDAH space.

Finally, we also need to consider the comments our reviewers make about the inclusion of digital art in our mission. Their recommendation to expand rather than contract will, we think, make IDAH a more effective champion of digital methods precisely because digital-methods work crosses so many disciplinary boundaries. At the same time, we need to expand our partnerships with, and our programming for, digital artists on campus in ways that are more coherently directed toward the different creative and academic training structures that govern the work of a digital artist. We need to carefully review and adjust the Digital Arts & Humanities Minor/Certificate to allow IUB artists the ability to participate in this academic program (consequently, this would also be helpful for other affiliates for which a Masters is the terminal degree). This requires acknowledging the shorter time to terminal degree for artists, and improved outreach at the undergraduate level. So, too, will one of the space considerations that we mention in our strategic plan, which offers up room for an artist in residence that would dovetail nicely with programming offered by Maxwell Hall.

The overarching themes in the review clearly run along two lines: a strategic expansion of collaborations and partnerships to shore up IDAH's perceived gaps, and a strategic approach to balancing the breadth of IDAH's support for research across many lines with a depth of funding wells that does not over-extend us as a center in the short term. To successfully address these overarching recommendations and the action items presented, IDAH will need financial and organizational support in staffing, extended space, and a digital-artist-in-residence.

Many other recommendations emerged, several of which we intend to address within our current scope: branding, promoting/seeding publication and presentation opportunities for our affiliates at the national/international level to name a few.