

RDA 2016-2017 Fellowship Application: “Evaluating Research Data Infrastructure for the Digital Humanities”

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As the development of digital research infrastructure matures, digital humanities scholars are faced with new opportunities and challenges. In many ways, research data infrastructure can support new practices and modes of collaboration in humanities research – creating sustainable space to archive digital empirical materials, to preserve the contextualization of these materials with metadata and provenance, and to bridge humanities research with scientific disciplines through responsible data sharing. Yet, there are also several barriers to the adoption of research data infrastructure in the humanities. Compared to research in the sciences, digital humanities projects are more often than not working with much tighter budgets and less access to technical expertise. Further, the design of certain research infrastructures can be at odds with the way digital humanists think about the world. As Alexander Galloway questions, “Having inherited the computer, are [digital humanists] required to think with it?”

In the proposed project, I will question: what are the barriers to adopting RDA standards in digital humanities projects? I will do so by 1) participating in discussions around the barriers to RDA data infrastructure adoption amongst digital humanists and 2) ethnographically analyzing and writing up these barriers. Drawing on this insight, I will propose a new working group on supporting digital humanities adoption of research data infrastructure. A timeline for this project is proposed below:

May 2016 – I will analyze and write up the barriers that the Platform for Experimental Collaborative Ethnography (PECE) has faced in adopting RDA infrastructure. I have served as the lead platform architect for PECE for the past three years. In many ways, we have directed data management and infrastructure in the project according to RDA best practices; however, in attempting to do so, have run up against many issues of both feasibility and applicability. I will use this opportunity to document these challenges.

June 2016 – I will help Bridgit Almas and Kim Fortun plan *RDA/ADHO Workshop: Evaluating Research Data Infrastructure Components and Engaging in their Development*, a workshop that will be held in conjunction with the Digital Humanities 2016 conference. This workshop will bring together various digital humanities communities that are committed to data sharing and interested in research infrastructure development and preservation. During the workshop, we will discuss the solutions proposed by the Persistent Identifier (PID) Types and Data Types Registry (DTR), discuss use cases for implementing these solutions in various projects, and then discuss the barriers to adopting these solutions in the digital humanities.

In the planning stage (June), I will reach out to relevant RDA communities, asking for summaries of their outputs and how they could be implemented in digital humanities communities. I will also design a survey that will be distributed to workshop participants prior to the workshop, asking about their research data infrastructure requirements. Finally, I will design and distribute a use case template for workshop participants to fill out prior to the workshop.

July 2016 – I will participate in and take notes at the *RDA/ADHO Workshop*, which will later be analyzed and formalized into an RDA report.

August 2016 – I will produce a report that describes the feedback/cost-benefits to research data infrastructure adoption discussed at the RDA/ADHO workshop. This report will be submitted to the RDA community for consideration and feedback. I will also follow-up with workshops participants, networking them with appropriate members of the RDA community to help with implementation of various outputs.

September 2016 – I will plan and host a Birds of a Feather meet-up at RDA Plenary 8 that discusses the barriers to digital humanities adoption of RDA infrastructure. This will include the Digital Practices in History and Ethnography Interest Group and the PID Working Group. During this Birds of a Feather, we will discuss the outcomes of the *RDA/ADHO Workshop*, and begin planning for a working group that addresses the barriers to digital humanities adoption of RDA infrastructure.

October 2016 – I will produce a write-up on September's birds of a feather and distribute it to the participating interest/working groups.

November 2016 – I will host a virtual meeting that brings together parties interested in forming a working group around barriers to RDA standards adoption in the digital humanities.

December 2016 to May 2017 – I will work with interested parties to establish a working group proposal specifically focused on bridging the gaps that make it difficult for digital humanities communities to adopt RDA infrastructure. The working group will plan to develop an RDA primer for digital humanities communities to help them orient to the outputs of the RDA. This primer will 1) define and outline outputs that digital humanities communities should be aware of, 2) offer use cases on how the outputs can be implemented, 3) provide a directory of individuals that digital humanists can reach out to for support, and 4) address barriers to implementation and describe some options for moving forward.

April 2017 – At Plenary 9, I will coordinate a second Birds of a Feather that brings together several working groups relevant to the digital humanities to plan and develop use cases for the aforementioned primer.

My current dissertation research addresses how the logics of digital infrastructure compare against humanistic ways of thinking about the world. Working with digital humanities groups to address the barriers to adopting research data infrastructure will directly support this research. Further, the fellowship will support the continued improvement of PECE's data management infrastructure, a project that I have worked on for several years and hope to continue to contribute to throughout my career. Finally, developing a primer for RDA adoption in digital humanities communities will give me an opportunity to both network with digital humanities communities – a space where I hope to eventually build a career – and also contribute to these communities an entry point for engaging in data sharing and data infrastructure best practices.

Throughout this fellowship, I will work closely with the Digital Practices in History and Ethnography interest group, the Metadata for the Humanities working group (of which I am a co-chair), and the PID working group. As the fellowship progresses, I plan to identify other important working groups to coordinate on a primer for the digital humanities.