Working Toward an Integrated Digital Humanities Platform in Islandora

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Abstract

One of the primary goals of the digital humanities is to systematically integrate computer systems and services into the activities of humanities scholars. There are many projects that work toward this goal, but these projects are often "one-offs" from a technology perspective: they focus on a single activity or set of activities and function independently from one another. The Islandora project, in collaboration with a number of digital humanities stakeholders, has been developing an integrated platform that combines a variety of front-end scholarly tools with a robust digital preservation back-end. This presentation will highlight the challenges and opportunities discovered along the way, and showcase both what we have accomplished and what we plan to do in the coming months.

An Islandora Digital Humanities Platform

A variety of Digital Humanities projects are working together to build tools for facilitating the work of digital humanists, scholars, educators. This work ranges from the development of research/reference collections to coordinating workflows and authority development across projects. Increasingly, such efforts need to be based on common standards (e.g. MODS, TEI) in order to provide some degree of interoperability and collaboration. It is therefore imperative to work toward standardization on a common software framework.

However, integrating existing tools into the Islandora repository platform presents its own set of challenges. Most existing tools are in various stages of completion and do not have solid development timelines. They are built using a variety of programming languages and system-level dependencies, and in most cases they were never designed with interoperability in mind. Therefore, a great deal of technical expertise and effort is required to gather together the best candidates for Digital Humanities tools, evaluate their effectiveness, and plan a path for integration into the Islandora platform.

Despite these challenges, much progress has been made toward building an integrated Digital Humanities platform in Islandora. Notable developments include the integration of a text markup editor (CWRCWriter) and an image annotation tool (Shared Canvas), support for entities, and a robust framework for ingesting, viewing, and manipulating books and large images.

In 2013, continuing to build on partnerships with members of the DH community and developers around the world, discoverygarden will extend the Digital Humanities feature-set to include

collation tools, a robust workflow engine, and a variety of visualizations, creating a true scholar's workbench.