Collaborative Approaches to the Digital in English Studies

CHAPTER	3
TITLE	Technology-Focused Collaborative Research Initiatives in English Studies: The Possibilities of Team-Based Approaches
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OVERVIEW	This chapter examines the possibilities of collaborative, team-based research initiatives, focusing particular attention on three examples—the Writing in Digital Environments Research Center, the Digital Writing and Research lab, and projects of the University of California, Santa Barbara Department of English—led by faculty working in departments of rhetoric and writing or English. Unlike digitization or digital archive projects in which collaboration is focused almost exclusively on building resources, the team-based initiatives discussed involve participants in the exploration of technology-related research questions (e.g., questions about the processes of digital writing or about online reading practices) and lead to a variety of outcomes (e.g., blogs, white papers, software, workshops).
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Technology-Focused Collaborative Research Initiatives in English Studies: The Possibilities of Team-Based Approaches

Laura McGrath

This kind of work really requires a major rethinking of the whole profession in so many fundamental ways. – Faculty interviewee, UCSB

The subdisciplines of English studies have been investigating for several decades now the teaching and scholarship applications of digital tools and the relationship between technological developments and our objects of study. Promising scholarly research methods in the digital age, however, have not been explored as thoroughly. This chapter examines the possibilities of collaborative, team-based research initiatives, focusing particular attention on three examples led by faculty working in departments of rhetoric and writing or English. Unlike digitization or digital archive projects in which collaboration is focused almost exclusively on building resources, the team-based initiatives I will discuss involve participants in the exploration of technology-related research questions (e.g., questions about the processes of digital writing or about online reading practices) and lead to a variety of outcomes (e.g., blogs, white papers, software, workshops).

As I will argue, collaborative research initiatives that bring together teams of investigators to focus on technology-related questions of shared interest—teams that involve faculty, students, and possibly other stakeholders—deserve attention for the following reasons:

- Team-based initiatives offer flexible work models that can be adapted to various institutional situations, research interests, and emerging objects of study.
- They demonstrate productive ways of engaging students in research and contributing to their professionalization.
- They show how team-based initiatives—whether the collaboration takes place virtually or in a center, lab, or studio—can provide testbeds for theories and sites for examining practices (what Zorich [2009] refers to as "'sandboxes'" and "idea incubators" [p. 72]).
- They create assemblages of expertise, perspectives, and resources that make it possible to accomplish together what a lone scholar could not.

- They suggest new ways of disseminating research—in new contexts and for an audience that includes but also potentially goes beyond the department, the field, and the academy.

Despite these potential advantages, team-based approaches are associated with logistical, professional, and funding- and sustainability-related challenges that I will also discuss.

The quotations that I include throughout the chapter come from transcriptions of recorded interviews I conducted with students, faculty, and staff at the Writing in Digital Environments Research Center (Michigan State University), the Digital Writing and Research Lab (University of Texas, Austin), and the University of California, Santa Barbara English department during my visits to those sites. Naturally, the initiatives I observed have evolved and changed since my visits. For example, what was then the Computer Writing and Research Lab under the direction of Clay Spinuzzi is now the Digital Writing and Research Lab (DWRL) under the direction of Diane Davis. Nonetheless, the information I gathered from interviewees during those visits offers valuable perspectives on collaborative work and on the missions, outcomes, professional impact, and significance of the projects on which the interviewees worked.

In the context of this chapter, my field research provides a starting point for thinking about the ways in which, as the epigraph suggests, collaborative research initiatives in English studies challenge us to rethink fundamental aspects of our professional work. Examining my findings alongside literature about collaborative research, I explore the following questions:

- What might collaborative research look like and do in English studies?
- Who might team-based research involve and bring together?
- What might the outcomes of such initiatives be in terms of scholarly production as well as impact on participants?
- How is such work understood, valued, and evaluated/assessed in the profession?

CONTEXT

Generally speaking, collaboration is a necessary or particularly productive approach

- when the topic under investigation calls for a wide range of expertise,

- when the project is large in scale,
- when it is desirable to form partnerships in order to share resources (which might include time and intellectual resources as well as material resources), and/or
- when it is desirable to form partnerships with stakeholders from other disciplines, divisions, or campuses; from the community; and/or from industry.

Literature on digital resource development (i.e., digital libraries, archives, and data repositories) provides one perspective on collaborative partnerships in the humanities. In Marta Mestrovic Deyrup's (2009) *Digital Scholarship*, for example, John Straw argues that, to ensure success, collaborators must address "issues such as ownership, copyright, branding, access, [and] costs" and draw up formal contracts or letters of agreement (p. 105). In the same collection, Shawn Martin writes about sustainability and infrastructure as they relate to large-scale collaborative projects.

Within English studies, and writing studies in particular, the majority of scholarship on technology-related collaboration focuses on pedagogy or collaborative professional writing rather than team-based research initiatives (e.g., Reiss, Selfe, & Young, 1998; Hewett & Robidoux, 2010). James Porter (2009), formerly a Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) research center co-director, does focus attention on research centers in an essay on sustainability that asks, "What role can a research center play in helping to support and enhance the profile of a writing program?" (p. 1). And, although only a handful of chapters address team-based projects, English studies scholars are represented in James Inman, Cheryl Reed, and Peter Sand's (2004) *Electronic Collaboration in the Humanities*, a collection that draws attention to theoretical perspectives, to collaborative pedagogical and scholarly projects, and to "the specific way that information technologies impact collaboration in the humanities" (p. xx).

Recently, most of the dialogue about team-based collaboration in English studies has focused on digital humanities research projects. For example, Lynne Siemens (2009) writes,

> Given that the nature of research work involves computers and a variety of skills and expertise, Digital Humanities researchers are working collaboratively within their institutions and with others nationally and internationally to undertake this research. This research typically involves the need to coordinate efforts between academics, undergraduate and

> graduate students, research assistants, computer
> programmers/developers, librarians, and other individuals as well as the
> need to manage financial and other resources. (p. 225)

Siemens notes that "there has been little formal research on team development within this community with few protocols in place to prepare individuals to work within these research teams" (pp. 225-226), and her research focuses on identifying the components and working methods of successful teams.

Collaboration and the digital humanities has also been the focus of, for example, threads on the HUMANIST discussion list and a 2009 MLA panel entitled "Links and Kinks in the Chain: Collaboration in the Digital Humanities," wherein panelist [Bethany Nowviskie](#) drew attention to "status inequalities among collaborators and . . . some of the vexing intellectual-property issues collaborative work raises" (Howard, 2010, A10). And, finally, Diane Zorich's (2008) *[Survey of Digital Humanities Centers in the United States](#)*[1], commissioned by the Council on Library and Information Resources, presents general information about the attributes, missions, governance, administration, and operations of digital humanities centers based on her survey of thirty-two centers, including the DWRL and WIDE. I will incorporate some of Zorich's findings into the current chapter.

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Initially, I became interested in the [Writing in Digital Environments Research Center](#) (WIDE), the [Digital Writing and Research Lab](#) (DWRL), and the [University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) English department](#) because of the research being conducted there on digital writing (WIDE, DWRL), online reading (UCSB), and information culture (all three). Using funds awarded to me by my home institution's Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, I planned research trips to each site with the idea that I might be able to adapt some of their methods and implement them. I work in a technology-rich English department. All classrooms feature an instructor console with projection capabilities, there is a computer for every student in our writing classes, and we have an enviable collection of camcorders, voice recorders, and other tools that can be checked out for classroom use. What is more, the department includes a diverse group of faculty (and some students) who are interested in technology. It is an

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[1] Unlike my research, which included interviews with researchers/collaborators and staff as well as directors, Zorich's survey "was conducted through interviews with senior management" (p. 1). Though my study was much more limited in scope than hers, I do believe it is important to obtain a wider variety of perspectives in order to better understand the work of a center.

environment that seems ideal for exploring points of intersection between reading, writing, and emerging technologies and user practices. But what, I wondered, was the best way to proceed with such investigations? What began in this way as a search for pragmatic collaborative research methods soon grew in scope.

My research into the initiatives began with the study of their Web sites (see links above) and associated publications. In order to gather more detailed information about the initiatives, I visited each site and conducted a total of forty-two interviews with directors, affiliated researchers, graduate and undergraduate students, and staff (see Appendix A for interview questions). While at the sites, I also toured and photographed the spaces associated with the initiatives (labs, studios, conference rooms, server rooms, etc.) and, when possible, attended project meetings (see Appendix B for slideshows of photographs from all three sites).

As I will discuss, I discovered common threads that I had not anticipated. These commonalities raise questions about the process and products of scholarly research, the way research is disseminated, the way our graduate students are professionalized, and so forth. My field research prompted me to conduct additional secondary research into collaborative initiatives in the humanities, and I have incorporated some of those findings into the current chapter, bringing them into conversation with the voices from WIDE, DWRL, and UCSB.

COLLABORATIVE, TEAM-BASED RESEARCH INITIATIVES: THREE EXAMPLES

Before drawing conclusions about collaborative, team-based research based on my interviews and observations as well as my secondary research, I'd like to offer an overview of each of the three sites that I visited. As Zurich (2008) says of the digital humanities centers that she surveyed, these initiatives create "zone[s] of experimentation and innovation for humanists" (p. 5).

Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) Research Center

WIDE's official mission statement can be found on the center's Web site, which also serves a forum for news updates and the dissemination of research. One interviewee described the WIDE Center as "a professional and intellectual network—a community," which is fitting given the center's emphasis on

collaborative professional inquiry. Additional interviewee perspectives on WIDE's mission flesh out the official statement (emphasis mine):

> The main purpose, as I understand it, is to find out **how digital writing works in people's lives** at this point because [writing is] becoming increasingly technology-oriented . . . I think the research side is figuring out how all that works and then . . . a lot of the outreach stuff is helping people figure that out, helping them understand this so they can know how to do these things that they are increasingly needing to do. – *Undergraduate research assistant*

> I see [the mission] as primarily focused on research and how it is that writing in digital environments unfolds . . . and all the ways in which community members need various access to resources and need capacities built and the like. [In some cases they produce a product], but in other cases it's capacity building [and] they're always studying how it is that people need that work done and how writing unfolds in those contexts. . . . They've done such a terrific job of **bridging their research and their service and their community initiatives**. They've done asset surveys of the communities and seen what kinds of capacities are there and what kinds of knowledge bases and what kind of social resources and structural resources are there and they develop initiatives from that and develop initiatives around the kinds of problems that community members identify. – *Faculty researcher*

> We know very little about digital composing practices and WIDE, to me, is a space that's doing really amazing, inventive, smart work in **helping us better understand how composing happens in digital spaces**. – *Faculty researcher*

> We have a particular take on writing in digital environments that defines our research trajectory and it tends to be a focus on the shape of knowledge work generally, and what that means is that we look at t**he writing that people do on a day-to-day sort of basis** . . . . We're more interested in where digital writing sort of crops up and becomes mission critical to people. We go there and we study it and we try to make it easier to do. – *Bill Hart-Davidson, Co-director*

In sum, WIDE's projects focus on real-world digital writing and knowledge work. They are often tied to community needs and serve community stakeholders. And,

in addition to disseminating research outcomes through traditional scholarly venues, WIDE researchers build and improve communication tools.

Although the WIDE co-directors have faculty appointments in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures, the center itself exists independent of the department. The center is unique in that it is not charged with supporting students or faculty in their work with technology; as its name suggests, it is purely a research center. WIDE's physical space includes offices, meeting and planning spaces, and a server room. Since WIDE is a research center rather than a teaching-with-technology support unit, there are no labs. This means that budget can be spent on people rather than machine maintenance and upgrades.

WIDE began its work of "[supporting] faculty research focused on understanding how writing works in online environments" in 2003, and the center was "[i]nitially funded by the Michigan State University Research Foundation" (Grabill, 2005, p. 100). As one of the directors explained during an interview, WIDE generally engages "in research for money, either by contract or by grant." WIDE's co-directors identify the center's research trajectories, manage multiple projects at any given time, and put together teams that include students. The projects that WIDE takes on provide the center not only with research opportunities but also with professionalization opportunities for student workers—project management, grant writing, involvement in all aspects of research. In other words, undergraduate and graduate students who work on WIDE projects become co-researchers under the guidance of a faculty member and, as Jeff Grabill explained, learn how to "coordinate and manage a research project to produce an outcome for a client."

Outcomes of research projects include reports and recommendations, white papers published on the Web site, traditional scholarship, and, more recently, software. Co-director Hart-Davidson sums up the center's ultimate goal: "we want to try to make a difference for the better by changing the writing environments in which people work, building new tools, improving existing tools, and generally applying this knowledge that we're creating to making the conditions for communicating better."

Digital Writing and Research Lab

Unlike WIDE, the Computer Writing and Research Lab (now Digital Writing and Research Lab) at UT Austin is a unit of the Department of Rhetoric and Writing, it is funded by the College of Liberal Arts, and it has clearly defined responsibilities

for supporting teaching and learning. A [history of the Lab](#) and the official [mission statement](#) can be found on the DWRL Web site. The Lab has a dual focus on teaching and research, and it is charged with supporting the writing courses that are taught in its computer classrooms and the people who teach those courses. In terms of physical space, the Lab includes several computer classrooms, an office, open labs for students, and a server room.

Clay Spinuzzi had this to say about the lab he was then directing:

> Basically, we are really interested in how technology is changing how people write, how people argue, how they see themselves as workers and citizens and scholars and students. . . . we are trying to figure out, when you throw these new technologies in the mix, how does it change the task? How does it change the way people do the sort of things they need to do? So we wanted to go beyond individuals sitting in front of computers and we wanted to see how this is changing their work, their culture, their society.

> Number one we are trying to discover these new uses that are occurring for writing and technology. We try to find ways to study those systematically through formal research projects, through research and development, through blue-sky trial and error. The things we find out we pull into our classrooms and use that to help students become better leaders, better citizens, [and] better workers.

Other interviewees addressed the Lab's goals, focusing particular attention on its pedagogical mission (emphasis mine):

> [The lab is] supposed to facilitate not only theoretical approaches to technology and emerging technologies but facilitate participation in these technologies. . . . So it's supposed to **support pedagogy that's technologically enhanced** and also it's supposed to allow both faculty and students to develop [digital material and projects] . . . It's really a hands-on practical environment. . . . [And a guiding question for the Lab is] how can we facilitate good pedagogy in rhetoric and writing, writ large, with the use of technology? – *Faculty affiliate*

> Students are coming in with very different media exposures than I had . . . I think that the [DWRL] is . . . in some sense a reaction to that and a recognition that we need **new pedagogical strategies** to connect with the

type of students who are coming in. – *Graduate student (assistant instructor; workgroup member)*

We empower our teachers to teach in our labs . . . on the one hand we are helping out people teaching in those classrooms by providing the resources—the actual **computer resources**—and also a lot of instructors have not been given a lot of instruction on how to teach before they have actually been pushed into those roles, so we try to help them figure out how to actually use that technology in their classrooms. [One of the goals] is **to help teachers teach effectively** in these spaces. [The other goal is to have the lab] producing research through the developers and the workgroup projects led by the developers. – *Graduate student (assistant director)*

Like WIDE, the Lab follows a collaborative, team-based research model (see Figure 1). Diane Davis has assumed directorship of the Lab, but, as I've mentioned, the director at the time of my visit was Clay Spinuzzi, and Clay had three assistant directors working with him: John Jones, Jim Brown, and Woo Yeom. Assistant directors are graduate students who are in charge of managing lab proctors, leading workshops on new technologies, running orientations for assistant instructors, distributing work to the lab's developers—other graduate students who lead research teams called workgroups in investigating topics such as visual rhetoric or gaming.
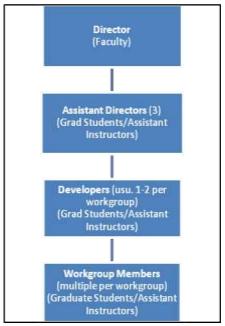

Figure 1. DWRL work model.

Assistant directors meet with developers on a regular basis, making sure, to use the words of one assistant director, that "everyone is producing significant work" in the form of some concrete deliverable—for example, a white paper, a blog, a game. These deliverables are then disseminated by way of the Lab's Web site. An assistant director comments, "we're contributing both pedagogically and . . . research-wise to our field and to the university." Another interviewee provided the following example:

> Viz is a visual rhetoric Web site where we're attempting to build an archive of theoretical perspectives, pedagogical tools, all related to visual rhetoric. And we also have a visual rhetoric blog to which we contribute . . . people from my workgroup and actually some people, now that we're getting it going, from other institutions as well. . . . And so that's a really nice example of how somebody goes in the classroom, does something, informs the rest of the community about it, the community comments on it, and then the broader community can come here and read about it. So there you have a really nice picture of . . . how the [DWRL] can serve students and can serve instructors and can serve a broader community. – *Graduate student (Workgroup member)*

So, while the Lab has a unique pedagogy-focused mission, like the WIDE Center, it does collaborative team-based research in a way that results in concrete, disseminated outcomes and provides professionalization opportunities for students.

The University of California, Santa Barbara, English Department

The UC Santa Barbara English department might seem out of place next to WIDE and the DWRL, but its collaborative, team-based digital humanities initiatives and centers make it a very relevant research model to study. During my visit, I learned about The Early Modern Center, Transcriptions, Transliteracies, and several other projects. A graduate student interviewee who had been active in a number of the department's collaborative projects described the initiatives in this way:

> What you're seeing in part is various ways of people saying, well, how can we use new communications and information technologies to do what we do? And then the second and more exciting question is how can we use them to do things that we don't do yet but should be doing? . . . So

> Transcriptions, Transliteracies . . . over and over again you see people asking very broad questions and letting people come together to sort of sit with them.

The teams of researchers who "come together" around the problems, topics, and tasks demonstrate that collaboration has intellectual as well as practical benefits, as the diversity of perspectives enriches the research process as it shapes the trajectories and supports the outcomes of this work.

For the sake of space, I will focus on one initiative in particular: Transliteracies. As its Web site suggests, the purpose of Transliteracies is to research "the Technological, Social, and Cultural Practices of Online Reading." Professor Alan Liu is the project's principal investigator. Transliteracies brings together scholars from a variety of UC campuses and departments—English, Computer Science, Media Studies, Education—in addition to graduate research assistants who sometimes serve as project coordinators, facilitating communication among researchers and updating the Web site. Research assistants come from a variety of departments and are recruited through their advisors.

Participants join one of three interdisciplinary workgroups: History of Reading, New Reading Interfaces, or Social Computing. The research, as it was described to me, has focused on identifying objects for study and on researching the topics mentioned above. Outcomes, almost all of which are available on the Transliteracies Web site, include reports and bibliographies. More recently, the RoSE project has launched: RoSE, "currently a demonstration project in early development by the UC Transliteracies Project," is "a research-oriented social environment for tracking and integrating relations between authors and documents" ("RoSE").

As is the case at WIDE and the DWRL, UCSB graduate students play an integral role in the workgroups. A project coordinator explains: "all the research assistants work toward helping Transliteracies . . . build an archive of artifacts related to online reading. And that would entail both identifying interesting objects for study and [creating] longer research reports about select interesting objects." In addition to the explicit research goals of the project, the importance of the collaborative project work is described by another interviewee in terms of "thinking of new ways of producing knowledge and . . . learning from other disciplines."

FINDINGS: COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

Though WIDE, the DWRL, and the UCSB centers and projects have unique missions and structures, the collaborative, team-based, and technology-focused research that they enact shares common characteristics. First, again and again in my interviews at all three sites, people referenced research and work models from outside of English studies: models that come from the sciences or from managed projects like software development. The result in each case is a "workgroup" model for English studies. Further, models from the sciences and engineering were discussed in terms of their dependence on grants, and questions were raised about funding, sustainability, and influence as they relate to collaborative research in English studies.

Second, at each site, interviewees raised similar professional concerns that can be phrased as questions:

- What is the ultimate goal of research and who are the audiences for our research outcomes?
- When dissemination goes beyond the scholarly essay and conference presentation and outcomes are made available on the Web in the form of, for example, white papers, blog entries, and multimedia texts, what do we need to know about scholarly publication, authorship, authority, and copyright?
- How will collaborative, technology-focused work and collaborative outcomes be evaluated in terms of tenure and promotion, course loads/releases, and so forth?

Third, all three sites take seriously their role in preparing students for their future professional work. In fact, professionalization was a subject that came up quite frequently in my interviews. In "Messy Contexts," Rebecca Rickly (2007) critiques the standard research methods course, arguing that "students should be given the opportunity . . . to conduct actual research studies" and suggesting that "support for conducting research should be offered frequently, throughout a graduate student's career" (p. 395). The ways in which WIDE, the DWRL, and the USCB initiatives involve students in research certainly address this issue. The students are given significant responsibilities, involved in the intellectual work of the projects as co-researchers or leaders, and encouraged to gain experience in a variety of practical areas such as project management, grant writing, and technical work.

These commonalities give shape to the discussion that follows:

Humanities Work and Models from Other Fields of Endeavor

(a) *From Science, Engineering, and the Tech Industry to the Humanities*

Interviewees at all three sites referenced work models from science, engineering, and technical industries. For example, during our interview, a WIDE co-director explained, "We didn't really have any models, certainly not within our own field, so we were trying to take a look at social science and natural science models for how these centers typically operated at a fairly high level of abstraction [because of the differences in capabilities and missions]." A DWRL assistant director noted, "Our work group model is not specific to us . . . , as I understand it, it is how a lot of software companies and tech industries work." And, at UCSB, an interviewee discussed "big humanities," "an analogy to big science . . . [that points to efforts] to follow engineering or other sorts of lab cultures."
The relationship between humanities work and models from scientific or technical disciplines calls to mind literature about humanities "labs" and "collaboratories." Writing about thematic research collections in the digital humanities, Carole Palmer (2004) discusses "The Humanities Laboratory" and references collaboratories in the sciences:

> In the sciences the virtual laboratory, or collaboratory, concept has been around for some time. Traditional laboratories that are physically located encourage interaction and cooperation within teams, and collaboratories extend that dimension of research to distributed groups that may be as small as a work group or as large as an international research community. Collaboratories are designed as media-rich networks that link people to information, facilities, and other people . . . They are places where scientists can obtain resources, do work, interact, share data, results, and other information, and collaborate. (p. 356)

A "successful" humanities laboratory (physical) or collaboratory (virtual), Palmer notes, will provide researchers with the materials, tools, and "activity support" they need and will facilitate resource and information sharing as well as other forms of collaboration (p. 356). And within the field of English studies, Karen Lunsford and Bertram Bruce (2001) identify the following attributes of a collaboratory (see their article for detailed descriptions): "shared inquiry," "intentionality," "active participation and contribution," "access to shared resources," "technologies," and "boundary-crossings" (referring to the bridging of

"gaps and distances" of "geography," "time," "institutions," and "disciplines") (p. 55). The initiatives that I observed at WIDE, the DWRL, and UCSB are more closely aligned with the "traditional" laboratory model than the "collaboratory" model, with the possible exception of the Transliteracies project. In all cases, however, the initiatives share the characteristics set forth by Palmer (2004) and Lunsford and Bruce (2001) and demonstrate how a model from non-humanities fields has been productively adapted within English studies research contexts.

An interview with a UCSB graduate student, however, problematizes the laboratory metaphor and calls its appropriateness and long-term applicability into question. The interviewee's comments are worth quoting at length (emphasis mine):

> My sense is that for myself and for the community of people that I worked with, one of the functions of the centers was to build a community around some shared concepts. . . . [but] is the concept of a lab, a place with shared material resources like in the sciences or like in a computer lab which then becomes the locus for a professional community to do research and be socially organized around shared equipment . . . a good model for the digital humanities? Or **should we ditch the metaphor and start talking about arranging conceptual investigative communities** and conversations around other metaphors? My suspicion is that maybe we're really in a one-researcher-multiple-personal-computers (laptop and PDA) state now and that the lab idea is long in the tooth. . . . **the idea of the center is really something we need to emphasize as a conceptual community and not as a room**.

> People just don't get together in a computer lab to work. They work on their own computers. [So] the idea of what we were going to use these places for and why they were important to set up . . . my sense is it shifted pretty quickly. . . . **My laptop is an invaluable center of hundreds of software tools that I've carefully collected and arranged over time and thousands of documents** and when I want to do serious work with someone that I'm collaborating with on something that I consider research, I'm not going to go sit down in front of a vanilla computer in the middle of a center somewhere. You know? I want to be at the locus of my own library, and everyone is building their own.

The key point here is that today's humanities research diverges from scientific research that requires brick-and-mortar laboratories and the expensive, non-

portable tools they house. In light of the UCSB interviewee's points, it is prudent to consider what models and metaphors will shape the future of "conceptual investigative communities" in English studies. This will be especially important in planning and allocating funds for any physical spaces and equipment associated with collaborative projects.

(b) *Funding and Sustainability*

Funding, Sustainability, and the Influence of Context and Grant-Making Agencies

Interviewees with whom I spoke made connections between science and engineering models and the issues of funding and sustainability facing collaborative humanities projects. Take, for example, this statement from a WIDE interviewee (emphasis mine):

> Universities . . . especially research universities, are starting more and more to push on the liberal arts the models we see in science and engineering where there's **an expectation that you will be grant seeking**, you will be bringing in money, you will be sustaining yourself. Boy, if we don't start looking in these directions we're in big trouble. . . . being forced to bring in your own money can be painful . . . but it can also be positive because it allows you different spaces to share your message and validate in different ways what you do. But I don't think it can happen well in a sustainable way unless there's something like this, a center where there are people who workshop grants and a center where people can pull together materials and a center to do all of the really hard **intellectual and detail-oriented work of funding your research**. – *Faculty researcher*

The terms *entrepreneurial* and *grant-seeking* came up in a number of interviews, and these terms also appear in associated literature. A UCSB interviewee explained that initiatives have to be somewhat "entrepreneurial," actively seeking external grants (e.g., NEH) and internal grants, such as instructional development/improvement grants. A DWRL assistant director noted that by making contributions to both the department and beyond (e.g., to the field or to the community), the Lab was "ultimately . . . trying to get outside funding. Those smaller projects should hopefully ultimately result in production of something that can be part of a grant proposal." And a report entitled "The Impact of the Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) Research Center" (2007) explains that WIDE "pursues research contracts [and] other entrepreneurial opportunities" (p. 1). For

example, the center has "launched a major new entrepreneurial initiative with the Eli Broad College of Business and interested outside investors focused on improving business writing and communication" (p. 4). The report also notes that WIDE had "[doubled] the number of grant-active faculty and [grown] considerably the value of grants sought and received" (p. 2). During an interview with a WIDE co-director, I learned that, with the center's initial grant funds running out, "from this point on the research center is only the projects that it has going, and it can only have projects going that it can afford to do, so projects that people pay us to work on. And so that's the sustainability model for a center like this."

If the sustainability of collaborative research initiatives headed by English studies scholars is, in large part, dependent upon grants, then this raises a number of issues. Grants for collaborative research in the humanities are smaller in amount and quantity than what is available in the sciences or engineering; there are currently a limited number of places to turn to for funding. And, importantly, some English studies scholars lack experience in grant writing or in building the sort of multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or academy-and-industry or academy-and-community partnerships that might provide access to a wider variety of funding sources.

Another issue to consider is that, if grant funding is essential to the life of a project, the agendas and preferences of grant-making agencies inevitably shape what gets studied. Here again, English studies has something to learn from the sciences. Writing about "Big Science" research, historian Bruce Hevly (1992) states, "Sponsor relationships . . . became part of the intellectual and social context of big science, and came to influence plans for further research" (p. 359). In the same chapter, Hevly shifts his focus to the humanities and writes, "the financial and political realities of academic life support the movement toward more sponsored research. . . . Scholars engaged in [collaborative research] projects should remain sensitive to the impact of these arrangements on our own work—arrangements that could influence the choice of topics, modes of presentation, and training of students" (p. 363). And, so, being entrepreneurial and grant-seeking also means being influenced by funding sources—a reality that deserves further attention from English studies scholars and their collaborators.

Hevly (1992) also notes that "institutional context affects the intellectual content of science" (p. 360). The influence of context was particularly evident at Michigan State University, with its land-grant history and outreach mission, and at UCSB, where interdisciplinary work is emphasized and supported, both philosophically

and monetarily, by administrators (a UCSB interviewee notes, "the campus hallmark is interdisciplinarity and it gets a lot of financial support."). In the same way that the agendas of grant-making agencies may shape the work of collaborative teams, so to do institutional agendas—or departmental agendas— shape research. Some scholars question whether institutional agendas lead to "boutique projects" (Friedlander, 2009, p. 6) with limited scope and relevance. Reiterating points made in her 2008 report, Zorich (2009) notes that there are "concerns that the proliferation of independent centers is creating silos of activity and redundant resources. There are worries about the prodigious amounts of digital production created by DHCs that remain untethered to larger, communitywide resources and preservation efforts. And there is a sense that center-based research agendas are at odds with digital scholarship's increasing need for large-scale collaborative endeavors and resource integration across departmental, disciplinary, and geographic lines" (p. 71). Overall, the initiatives I studied appear to benefit collaborators and, through their dissemination methods, other researchers in the field. But are initiatives like the ones undertaken by WIDE, the DWRL, and the UCSB English department "boutique projects"? Are these sites "silos of activity" when they might more productively focus on joining resources and pursuing larger-scale endeavors that address "communitywide" needs?

Sustainability Is Also About People

Sustainability, of course, has to do with people too. A DWRL assistant director explained, "It is not like a business where if someone is not producing we can fire them. So a lot of it has to do with how well we can motivate people and how well they can motivate themselves." And, indeed, the success of the initiatives I studied seemed to be predicated on the enthusiasm of those involved and the ability of directors and project leaders to motivate collaborators, make connections between the right people and stakeholders, and so forth.

Noting that "[w]e need a clearer model of a process for conducting large-scale collaborative projects, and we need to learn more about the essential elements and the kinds of attitudes that make large volunteer efforts work," Tari Fanderclai (2004) turns to the Linux development community as a model of "successful volunteer collaboration" (p. 312). As a result of her research, Fanderclai argues that "a large collaboration needs a coordinator who will be driven by his or her fascination with the subject matter to follow through and who knows how to attract interested and talented people to the project" (p. 315).

During my UCSB research trip, interviewee comments revealed that UCSB's Alan Liu is just this kind of coordinator. In my own interview with him, Liu talked about his team-building efforts and explained that his "style of running these programs is to be part of the working group" and to lead "working meetings, development meetings." Liu also noted that "you need the right kind of spider in the middle of the web to hold things together." Like the directors of the other initiatives I studied, Liu's enthusiasm, vision, and ability to connect people, ideas, and resources artfully and efficiently are essential to the initiatives he manages. Notably, there is some danger associated with such dependence on an individual, especially in terms of sustainability. Zurich's (2008) research reveals that projects sometimes fail when an "'evangelist' whose energy and enthusiasm provided much of the project momentum" leaves (p. 35).

Professional Concerns

(a) *Rethinking Dissemination*

During a DWRL interview, an assistant director explained that the workgroup model is "product-oriented so we can say at the end of the semester that this group actually produced something. . . . It can be as small as a white paper or as big as a Web site." A goal, he explained, is "to put everything out there for public consumption" and the Lab emphasizes openness: "everything we do is licensed under some sort of Creative Commons license." All three sites, in fact, put material "out there for public consumption" on their project Web sites. The Transliteracies Web site features a wealth of information that includes a detailed project description, planning documents, a "research clearinghouse," and participant information. And "featured news," a Twitter stream, and an aggregation of posts from affiliated blogs appear on the WIDE home page, and the site lists project descriptions and publications[2].

These initiatives, and WIDE in particular, still emphasize traditional scholarly dissemination through presentations and publications. The digital dissemination practices of the initiatives, however, raise questions about research and publication: When it comes to collaborative, technology-focused research, what should be shared, with whom, when, and where? Fanderclai's (2004) observations about lessons learned from the Linux developer community provide additional questions to consider. What would happen if English studies

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[2] The WIDE Web site is perhaps the least resource rich of the three initiative's sites, but it is still an interesting model of digital dissemination and of how humanities researchers are using social media tools (e.g., blogs and Twitter).

researchers released "early" and "often," sharing "all of the source materials—the methods, the raw data, the rough drafts, and the tentative conclusions . . . via the Internet as soon as they are created" (pp. 316-317)? What if "[r]esearchers could get feedback at every stage of the process, rather than working in isolation with no responses until a final publication comes out," viewing research audiences as potential "collaborators" and "coresearchers" (p. 317)?

Though the sites I studied are, to varying extents, putting information and resources "out there for public consumption," I did not get a clear sense of what the future goals of these initiatives might be with regard to digital dissemination and issues such as openness and collaboration with audiences. Openness tends to be valued by digital humanities initiatives "in the form of the free flow of ideas; transparency in work and practice; a progressive intellectual property system; and greater access to source material for the study of the humanities" (Zorich, 2008, p. 11). But true openness requires a more radical shift; openness that embraces social media and the inclusiveness and interactivity it supports "challenges the borders between disciplines as well as between professionals and amateurs, between scholars and knowledge enthusiasts. It raises questions of privilege and authority as well as ethical issues of credibility and responsibility, privacy and security, neutrality and freedom of expression" (Davidson, 2008, p. 711). Adopting open social models would mean, Fanderclai (2004) suggests, that "we need to share the work and the credit, recognizing the value of every contribution and every contributor" (p. 319). Addressing the implications of Davidson's (2008) and Fanderclai's (2004) claims is no simple task because it requires a rethinking of so many of the academy's long-standing assumptions. Although further exploration of this important topic is beyond the scope of the current chapter, Davidson's (2008) "Humanities 2.0" provides an informative overview of what trends toward collaboration and openness—along with "hybridity, exchange, flow, and cultural transaction" (p. 710)—might mean for writing, teaching, research, and gate-keeping traditions such as academic peer review. These subjects are also taken up compellingly by Alan Liu (2009).

(b) *Fairness, Recognition, and Promotion & Tenure within a "Culture of Isolation"*

During our interview, a UCSB faculty member, speaking about highly collaborative archival work undertaken with graduate students, made the following comments:

> One of the problems is that the profession has to acknowledge this kind of work as equal to publication. . . . It's along the science model. But the humanities have not accepted the science model. It wants us to work on the science model, but it doesn't know how to incorporate that into its age-old structures [such as tenure and promotion]. Is this a book? Is this an article? What is this? It wants us to do these [projects], but it doesn't want to give [proper credit]. So you have to fight like the dickens. Whereas in the sciences, it's automatic!

The same interviewee points out that leading a collaborative research project that involves students is "a different kind of teaching. . . . When you are heading these projects, you are actually teaching as well as doing research. So the lines between teaching and research really blur." These ideas lead to a conclusion that I heard stated in a variety of interviews at the sites I studied: traditional structures within our departments and colleges are often not prepared or flexible enough to evaluate alternative models of scholarship, dissemination, and instruction represented by collaborative research.

Quoting [National Initiative for a Networked Cultural Heritage](#) surveys, Randall Bass (2004) notes that "the 'lack of institutional commitment to collaborative work [and] general culture of isolation in scholarly work in humanties' were identified as serious obstacles to collaborative work" (p. 368). This is echoed by Fanderclai (2004): "[O]ur research traditions and reward systems can be barriers to collaboration. Humanists tend to value individual products . . . . Establishing oneself in the field requires carving out a territory of one's own and building up a store of personal intellectual property" (p. 314).

Zorich (2008) suggests that "[a] shift toward [an] evaluative framework—one that invests a level of trust in the work of the center and reflects that onto individuals—is needed in the humanities if scholars are to put significant efforts into the collaborative activities of regional and national centers" (p. 44). Success, of course, builds trust. In the case of WIDE, the center's successful work (measured, in part, by number of grants and publications) has "helped distinguish Michigan State University as an international leader in the areas of digital writing and literacy research" ("The Impact," 2007, p. 3).

In "Digital Texts and the Future of Scholarly Writing and Publication," Nicholas Burbules (1998) predicted that

> There will be new needs, needs to reassess what counts for tenure, salary or promotion purposes as a legitimate "publication"; who gets credit for certain kinds of collaborative work; how to judge the quality and originality of work that at least partly, if not largely, consists of the recombination and cross-linking of materials gathered from elsewhere on the Web . . . and so on. (p. 122).

Though the profession has made strides in the right direction thanks to the work of committees and task forces within our professional organizations (see Figure 2), my research suggests that satisfactory solutions have not been implemented equitably and consistently across institutions. Over a decade after Burbules made his comments, there is still more work to be done.[3]

CCCC Guidelines/Statements	MLA Guidelines/Statements
• Committee on Computers (7Cs) • Evaluating Work with Technology • Scholarship in Composition • T&P Case Studies	• Authors of Web Pages • Evaluating Scholarship for T&P • Evaluating Work with Digital Media • Evaluation Wiki • Publication in E-Journals

Figure 2. Guidelines and statements from professional organizations. Source: Ball, 2010.

Student Professionalization

As noted previously, students, and graduate students in particular, play an integral role in the initiatives I studied. Interviews with both faculty and students at the sites emphasized that this involvement offers a uniquely valuable professionalization opportunity; students are involved in the intellectual, practical, and community-building work of collaborative research, and they learn skills and methods that will serve them well in the future. A WIDE interviewee explains,

> If you look at research centers in other fields and other disciplines, they play a key role in graduate education. They provide on-the-job training for academics. That almost never exists in our field . . . . people can graduate with a Ph.D. in our field and never write a grant proposal . . . never

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[3] Isolated evidence of progress exists. For example, a University of Southern California's "Creativity and Collaboration in the Academy" Web page described efforts to revise "tenure and promotion to reward collaborative research," provide "financial support through the collaboration fund, enabling groups of faculty to work together on interdisciplinary research topics," and develop "resources to support sharing of data and information" (Office of Research, 2011).

understand what it's like to be part of a large research team, a collaborative project.

The professionalization experiences the field offers its students shape future researchers and thereby the future of research. Alongside comments about the practical benefits of involving student researchers in collaborative, technology-focused work emerged an argument about what faculty hope these future professionals (and possibly our future colleagues) will value and be able to do.

Professionalizing students is a clear priority at WIDE. A co-director noted, "despite the fact that we don't have an explicit curricular connection . . . one of our biggest successes might be the impact that we've had on the graduate program." As the following comments reveal, teaching and learning is interwoven with research at WIDE (emphasis mine):

> [The center teaches] students how to do research. Now it's not that they don't do research in their courses. They do. But it tends to be mainly textual research. [Working with WIDE they get] a really good sense of how you manage, coordinate and manage, a research project to produce an outcome for a client. I think students come out of their experience with **a really pragmatic, clear understanding of what it means to do research in writing and how it relates to rhetoric**. – *Faculty affiliate*

> We'll put together a team to conduct the actual inquiry and that team has almost always been a combination of graduate students and undergraduate students and sometimes the reason for that combination is to give some of our graduate students at both the master's and the Ph.D. level some **project management experience**. – *Co-director*

> As a matter of policy, we engage [students] as **co-researchers**. . . . My goal is to have everyone who comes through WIDE leave with the real possibility that they now understand how to do a project, how to get it funded, how to write a proposal, how to carry out the research, how to publish the results, and to understand that as **a trajectory of intellectual work**. – *Co-director*

Graduate student researchers whom I interviewed talked about gaining grant and project management experience, participating in "research that really helps change people's perception of the field and what the field can do and where the field really has a mission outside of academia," and discovering that "not only can

we make [digital writing practices] visible, we can do them better. And we can do them better through research and figuring out what's actually going on."

Undergraduates are also involved, though to a lesser extent than graduate students, in some WIDE projects. I was able to interview an undergraduate who worked for WIDE. The interviewee, who said that the experience had helped her learn about workplace writing, explained that she had written press releases and news items, made a brochure, advertised workshops, helped to update a Web site, and worked on a grant. In terms of research, she was preparing to interview people in the Lansing area as part of a WIDE-related project. An advisor explained, "we posed this question and gave her mentors and supported her in her development and she took it from there."

Like WIDE student researchers, graduate students at UCSB have opportunities to participate actively in research and to develop practical skills. Colloquia offer opportunities for students to present research, and some initiatives enable students to pursue projects that interest them. The Transliteracies project involves graduate students in a number of ways. A student project manager explains her "practical" and "research" work:

> I've been responsible for regulating a lot of the communication between the researchers, updating the Web site, handling [site] traffic. I do a lot of production stuff to archive our events. And in terms of research: All the research assistants work toward helping Translitercies build an archive of artifacts related to online reading. And that would entail both identifying interesting objects for study and longer research reports about select interesting objects.

Another graduate student affiliated with Transliteracies mentioned getting "to experience what it is like to be published in an online environment" and noted that her work on the project "was actually a really good professional experience." Alan Liu, the same interviewee explains, "involves us in the dinners with the [guest] speakers and the stuff that graduate students don't usually get to be involved with." "I was just thinking," she stated, "how involved everybody was, and excited, and interested in sharing their ideas. And I just thought how it is he inspires such an enthusiasm. And I really think it was just the way he created the program . . . instead of just giving maybe three grad students full stipends he did these smaller stipends. But they were still significant enough to inspire us to work."

Finally, the DWRL work model is also a professionalization model. My DWRL interviews revealed some of the ways that graduate students believe they benefit from their workgroup participation. For example, one interviewee explained, "We're doing research on [a] topic that we're also actively using in the classroom, so I think it's a really interesting way to make your [graduate student] instructors who are interested in this area . . . actively investigate the things they're interested in." Within the workgroups, the developer position is a good way to "incubate" leaders who can then apply to be assistant directors. After serving as developers, Spinuzzi explained, graduate students "have project management skills, now can plan these projects and think strategically as well as practically, and have a track record of working with other people."

These examples show how collaborative, technology-focused research initiatives can be excellent alternatives to problematic research methods courses (see Rickly, 2007) and can provide valuable professionalization opportunities for knowledge workers, whether or not they continue on to positions within the academy. Further, they emphasize what one of my UCSB interviewees pointed out: Working with students in these ways is a form of teaching.

CONCLUSION

Although space does not allow me to discuss the full range of ideas and issues my research uncovered, I have identified important commonalities, highlighted some of the most salient messages for English studies researchers, and connected those findings to perspectives from relevant literature. Collaborative, team-based, technology-focused research presents opportunities and challenges, as I have described and as Zorich (2008) details in her report about digital humanities centers.

On one hand, although interviewees at WIDE, the DWRL, and UCSB were generally positive about the efficacy of their work models, collaborative work is never easy. In order to remain sustainable, English studies research collaborations depend on funding that can be hard to come by and on the enthusiasm and community-building talents of a few key leaders. And it does take talent to assemble, manage, and motivate collaborators who bring diverse abilities, ambitions, goals, and levels of commitment to the partnership.

Such centers and initiatives also raise questions that are not easily answered. For example, are these initiatives "silos" and "boutique projects" that, for all their emphasis on collaboration, fail to join the larger humanities community in

addressing "marquee questions" and building needed resources (Friedlander, 2009, p. 2, 6, 5)? In adapting models from scientific and technical fields, do they somehow devalue the epistemological traditions of the humanities? Do they, despite a commitment to openness when it comes to dissemination, not go far enough in light of the interactivity and inclusiveness that social media support? Do they not do enough to seek the sort of institutional change that would more equitably acknowledge, evaluate, and support collaborative, digital, and alternative forms of scholarship and teaching?

On the other hand, centers and initiatives like the ones I studied offer distinct advantages to researchers. They provide critical mass, activity support, and other essential resources. Importantly, they sustain professional and intellectual networks that, as one interviewee explained, can serve as "intellectual catalyst[s]." A WIDE interviewee made the following statement: "Could we be doing this [research] in our separate little offices? I think we could. But it wouldn't happen in the same way with, I think, the same velocity that it does because WIDE exists and we can come here and talk about these issues and link into other projects that are going on." Collaborative approaches have intellectual and practical value, creating research communities that promote and accelerate inquiry and that are able to produce outcomes that are richer for the variety of perspectives that shape them.

The work of such initiatives can impact the field by demonstrating new ways of producing knowledge, by sharing resources, and by disseminating the results and products of their research through a variety of venues. Through outreach, initiatives can also impact communities beyond the academy. And, finally, as so many of my interviews revealed, initiatives like the ones I studied can professionalize the students affiliated with them, involving them in work that benefits them as knowledge workers and scholars and enabling them to learn about research from the inside out.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The goal of the research trips and the interviews was to discover what there was to know about the collaborative research initiatives and to learn as much as I could from project participants, directors, and staff. I went to each site knowing that I would not have all the right questions, and so I set aside time for open discussion and encouraged each interviewee to suggest additional topics and questions. The following list represents the questions that I used to begin interviews:

1. Please tell me your name, title/position, and your relationship to the initiative/project/center.
2. How would you describe the mission or goals of the initiative/project/center?
3. Did you face any challenges while working on the initiative/project?
4. What were the outcomes of the initiative/project? (Or, if the project is ongoing, what are the intended outcomes?)
5. How would you describe the value, impact, or significance of the initiative/project/center?
6. What else should I know about the initiative/project/center?

Prior to each interview, participants signed an IRB-approved consent form.

APPENDIX B: SLIDESHOW

During my site visits, I took photographs of the campuses and work environments I toured. The following slideshow presents some of those images, revealing my perspective on each place's *genius loci*. I regret that my tours generally happened when these spaces were empty of the very people whose work was the inspiration for this project, but I believe that my chapter captures what is missing from the photographs.