

ADHO, on Love and Money¹

Bethany Nowviskie, University of Virginia Library

Here's a word meant for the small audience of people who care about the inner workings of digital humanities professional societies. DH wonks, step this way.

The Association for Computers and the Humanities (ACH) was established in 1978 and is the primary US-based association for practitioners of humanities computing. I am its president, and a steering committee member of the umbrella group it helped to found in 2005. This is the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO), consisting of five international societies: ACH, ALLC (the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing), CSDH-SCHN (the Canadian Society for Digital Humanities/Société Canadienne des Humanités Numériques), centerNet (an international consortium of digital humanities labs and centers), and aaDH (the Australasian Association for Digital Humanities). Shortly, a sixth organization will join us: JADH, the new Japanese Association for Digital Humanities.

I've been a member of ACH for much longer than I've been active in its leadership or involved in ADHO—so my encounters with its budget sheets and expenditure records are recent enough to make me conscious of how opaque its doings must seem to the larger DH world it aims to serve. I hope to share some information here to help members and potential members understand how these organizations fit together, and what—particularly from the ACH point of view—we're up to, in an era of great expansion (and not a small amount of navel-gazing) for the digital humanities.

I write this post as an individual member of the ADHO organizations—seeking clarity (like you, maybe) on what it means to join a radically interdisciplinary professional association, how ACH works with its international partners, and (most of all) where exactly my membership fees go. Needless to say, this is not the official word from ACH or ADHO. It's just me, wanting to codify what I keep finding myself trying to express in 140-character tweets to questions online! It's also an offer to solicit fresh ideas and help them get heard.

The joint ADHO financial model—which strengthens our work and helps to coordinate and maximize the value of DH initiatives internationally—makes the last of that series of questions (“where does my money go?”) a little more complicated than it might be for other smallish professional societies. But it's important to ACH that we answer it, because we're a community-driven organization, supported by volunteer effort and membership fees. Our most important activities seek to cultivate and strengthen the digital humanities through our advocacy work and support of presentation and conversation venues, publications of various sorts,

¹ An earlier version was published as “DH Wonks, Step This Way,” on 19 September 2011 at <http://nowviskie.org/>.

awards, and events. We are also known for focusing a great deal of energy and material support on people new to the field—through mentorship activities (including networking events and our long-standing mentor-matching program), subsidies to training workshops such as DHSI (the Digital Humanities Summer Institute) and to unconferences, contributions to allied initiatives (like *4Humanities*), and the hosting of a variety of sites for dialogue and problem-solving. A lot of this runs on love, but it also takes money.

ACH and ADHO finances work like this:

The primary monetary transaction between individual members and the ADHO organizations is handled by Oxford University Press, publisher of our sole commercial journal: *LLC: the Journal of Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*. Individual subscribers to *LLC* are asked to indicate a primary affiliation with ACH or another association. They are also given the option to join all of the ADHO societies at once—therefore becoming eligible to vote in elections and receive communications or other specialized membership benefits from each group—by increasing their base payment. For instance, at the time of this writing, to move from an ACH-only membership to a joint ADHO membership, your fee will increase by \$14-25 USD, depending on your status. The present rate for ACH-only student or senior citizen members is \$69/year (soon to be drastically reduced!), while regular members pay \$139.

The cost for an individual ADHO membership is kept in balance with significant registration discounts offered to members for the annual Digital Humanities conference, held each year in different regions of the world. This means that, if you plan to attend DH, it is cheaper to join an ADHO organization than to pay the non-member's price.

Currently, seventy percent of the total profits from *LLC* are returned to ADHO. These form almost 100% of our income, not including considerable in-kind contributions made by our all-volunteer councils and committees. (I am not certain how the other groups handle this, but ACH does not subsidize travel or other costs incurred by its officers and executive council members in conducting the organization's business.) The arrangement with OUP allows us to take in more than members' fees; we add institutional or library subscription fees for *LLC* to the overall funding picture for ADHO, greatly increasing our financial stability. In fact, institutional subscriptions to *LLC* are far and away the largest revenue stream for the ADHO orgs, though we are conscious that this is not an expanding market.

ADHO is governed by a steering committee representing all its constituent organizations, and this committee authorizes disbursements to each according to an established (partly geographical) formula—after taking off a “top slice” of the income to cover operations that ADHO funds jointly. Disbursements to individual societies, like ACH, are meant to allow us the independence to serve our distinct (but increasingly shared) constituencies and to undertake local projects. Meanwhile,

the ADHO top slice funds: web hosting and infrastructure; training and conference attendance bursaries that make it possible for new people to get engaged in our work; support given to standards bodies; awards like the Fortier, Busa, and Zampolli Prizes; a small subvention for local hosts of the annual DH conference; and costs related to our other publications. In other words, ADHO organizations are just as solidly imbricated with the academic publishing industry as all of our peer professional societies—with the possible difference that we throw the profits from our one closed journal to a host of *open-access* publications and resources.

A desire to broaden in scope and serve a larger community motivated *Literary and Linguistic Computing's* adoption, several years ago, of the “*LLC*” moniker and its new, more general subtitle. (Apparently the wholesale changing of journal names—with both their historical associations, ISSNs, and institutional subscribers' lists—is a sticky affair.) I often hear concern that a perceived focus on text-based digital humanities limits *LLC's* penetration into that larger community. *LLC's* focus is evolving rapidly, but for many this remains a valid concern.

Unlike many similarly-sized professional organizations, however, ACH sponsors more than a single journal. We are aware that our members come from many different disciplinary perspectives and have just as many needs and requirements for their publication venues. In some DH professions, traditional print journals published by respected presses and participating in established citation ranking systems are critical (career-making or -breaking) publication venues. To others, newer and more interactive online publication venues are key. Different segments of the international DH community have differing relationships to open access publication. Sharp disciplinary focus is more and less important in different corners of DH.

To that end, ACH and its partner organizations in ADHO also sponsor:

- two peer-reviewed online, open access journals: *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly* and *Digital Studies / Le champ numérique*;
- ongoing open access to two seminal edited collections, published by Blackwell's: *A Companion to Digital Humanities* and *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*;
- and two book series: *Digital Research in the Arts and Humanities*, published by Ashgate, and *Topics in the Digital Humanities*, published by Illinois University Press.

These come in addition to less formal communications venues. Among others, we offer:

- the Humanist listserv (a long-standing “online seminar on humanities computing and the digital humanities”);
- *DH Answers: Digital Humanities Questions and Answers* (the open Q&A forum for all things DH, mentioned above);
- *DH Commons*, for finding project collaborators;

- the annual *Day of Digital Humanities* ethnography project;
- ADHO's informational website;
- and the websites of our constituent organizations, including whatever blogs, news-feeds, or initiatives they might individually host there—such as ACH's 16-year catalog of digital humanities-related sessions at the annual MLA Convention, and our ongoing effort to create a searchable database of all presentations at DH and ACH/ALLC conferences dating back to the 1980s.

This is a big list of publication and communications initiatives, and it is growing all the time.

What's my point? Although we often say that membership is “by subscription to *LLC*,” what we really should say is that copies of *LLC* are one of the benefits of your membership in the ADHO associations. That our other publications are overwhelmingly open-access does not mean that they are free. Neither are ACH's other services and initiatives—and our colleagues at the other ADHO orgs do similar good work with their slices of the pie. At the risk of sounding like a public radio fund drive, your membership dollars (or pounds or euros) make these things possible.

We must get better at communicating with our members—at bringing in new ideas and clarifying the broad range of activities we undertake. I think ACH has made great strides in the past few years. We've rolled out a new website and newsletter, undertaken a grassroots agenda-setting exercise, redoubled our efforts at mentoring, created *DH Answers*, and become much more active as an advocacy group, lobbying government agencies and offering expert testimony on issues important to our constituents and the future of the humanities. ACH has taken valid and helpful criticism to heart—such as that offered by Melissa Terras in her 2010 DH conference plenary talk, and frequently from our members via social media. I believe our ADHO partners have as well.

I hope this small and rough explanation—of how our membership model works and what we do with members' fees—is a further step in the right direction.