



## **SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE**

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### **Reports on Scholarly Publishing and Authoring**

Following the completion in July 2011 of our last planned summer session, SCI entered a new phase of work (1 January 2012 to 31 August 2013) focusing on the following program areas:

- Scholarly Production
- Graduate Education
- The Value of the Humanities in the Digital Age

SCI undertook concentrated work in these three areas, with continued generous support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Our goals for this period included fostering further development of **new-model scholarly authoring and production processes**; rethinking and redesigning the **methodological training of humanities scholars and scholarly communication professionals** for the digital age; and **building support for the humanities** by articulating their value in and for the digital age.

These program areas evolved from conversation at recent SCI institutes. Participants' attention reflected a growing sense of urgency felt by scholars and their scholarly societies, by presses and academic publishers, and by research libraries. The urgency is not only to understand the rapidly evolving landscape of scholarly communication, but to shape it by enacting a clear vision for scholarly communication in and for the digital age, a vision that carries forward centuries-long traditions of humanities scholarship.

Modes of scholarly communication are undergoing rapid transformation in all domains of knowledge, none more so than the humanities. SCI convened three meetings to explore a trio of projects that are leading sites of experimentation in scholarly production and authoring: the Alliance for Networking Visual Culture, developing new models of multimedia scholarship; PressForward, aggregating and curating web-first scholarly publication to develop modes of assessment that work at scale; and the Modern Language Association's new program in scholarly communication, focusing on moving formal publications and informal discourse into online environments. Each project explores a different model of

scholarly production and authoring, iteratively and in the open, and are reconfiguring humanities discourse for a world in which culture is created and experienced online.

It is our belief that these and other projects, designed to take risks, learn from experience, and share results with the professional communities dedicated to scholarly communication, make invaluable contributions to the advancement of humanities knowledge in the digital age. We offer these reports to share both the knowledge exchanged among participants and the challenging questions posed by these provocative programs.

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*The Scholarly Communication Institute (SCI) provided opportunities for leaders in scholarly disciplines, academic libraries, advanced technologies, and higher education administration to study, develop, and implement creative and innovative strategies to advance scholarly communication in the context of the ongoing digital revolution.*

*Generously funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation from 2003 – 2013, SCI events were hosted periodically by the University of Virginia Library and other institutions.*



## SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE

### Scholarly Production and Authoring

Institute of International Education, New York, NY

May 1-2, 2012

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### BACKGROUND

Modes of scholarly communication are undergoing rapid transformation in all domains of knowledge, none more so than the humanities. The Scholarly Communication Institute (SCI) has identified three projects in progress as leading sites of experimentation: the [Alliance for Networking Visual Culture](#), [PressForward](#), and the Modern Language Association's [new program in scholarly communication](#). They are developing new models for scholarly production and authoring, iteratively and in the open, and are reconfiguring humanities discourse for a world in which culture is created and experienced online.

The following report summarizes discussions, questions, and knowledge that emerged from a meeting of these projects. SCI, a program of the University of Virginia Library and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, convened participants from different sectors of the humanities, ranging from librarians and publishers to scholars and learned society administrators, and asked them to provide critical insights and advice to the projects' directors. Each of the programs described here targets specific points of leverage for change within existing systems, but also addresses shared concerns about audience, building and sustaining communities, academic workflow, and the human and technical infrastructure that supports scholarly communication.

#### [Alliance for Networking Visual Culture \(ANVC\)](#)

Tara McPherson, representing the work of a team of inter-institutional collaborators, explained that the impetus behind ANVC, which took shape in 2007-2008, was to develop capacities for scholarship using visual materials in their native formats. ANVC's strategy has been to engage scholars in their "natural habitus" and thus build focused partnerships with archives, presses, and now also humanities research centers. The group's motivating beliefs—centered in active and critical use of tools and the primacy of forms and platforms that serve content—led to the development of an authoring platform, [Scalar](#). Scalar serves as an "ideation space" as well as a publication and dissemination platform.

The driving forces in the project's development are the intellectual and aesthetic desires of scholars, including "animating the archive," making arguments in rich media, and contributing to

the curation of primary resources. Working from core scholarly questions outwards, the project has pursued deep partnerships with media archives (the Shoah Foundation, the Hemispheric Institute, the Internet Archive, and Critical Commons) and with publishers (University of California Press, Duke University Press, MIT Press, Open Humanities Press, and University of Michigan Press) who see multimedia publishing as both a challenge and an opportunity.

Current challenges include: deepening existing partnerships with archives and presses and expanding into work with humanities research centers; moving beyond Scalar's current focus on visual culture to encompass other fields and media, and working with other platforms (e.g., [Hypercities](#)).

### [PressForward](#)

Dan Cohen described the recently-launched PressForward scholarly imprint as an effort to identify and point to good online scholarship in whatever form it appears, regardless of genre. The critical focus of PressForward is scholarly attention, a rare and precious commodity in the online environment. The speed of discourse has been greatly accelerated by the Web, with strands of communication around timely topics expanding and contracting so rapidly that they risk going unnoticed, or being lost or insufficiently attended to as they make their way through the sluggish, overloaded circulatory system of print journals, monographs, and conference papers. The PressForward team deploys a combination of alternative metrics and human judgment to aggregate content for attention and make visible what rises to the top of scholarly interest.

The PressForward editorial group thinks less about formal experimentation with genres than about taking what is published on the Web, whatever its form, and determining how to assess its value to whom. Attention means selection. They have developed a curation model, the PressForward Pyramid, that starts from the open Web and, through [DHNow](#), presents content relevant to certain fields (which can be consumed through hourly updates, if users are keen); offers a smaller daily selection of "editors' choices;" and, at the top of the pyramid, highlights material that merits the greatest attention and is therefore re-published in the quarterly [Journal of Digital Humanities](#). As one SCI participant noted, this amounts to "re-intermediation," a curation, aggregation, and sorting for quality by peers. Scholars are already citing the selection of their work for re-publication in the quarterly journal as a measure of achievement in their CVs.

Challenges: developing appropriate metrics that combine the best of editorial judgment as well as alt-metrics/algorithmic analysis, the latter currently seen as less robust for the humanities. PressForward is keeping track of staff time; as human judgment is revealed to be an increasingly important asset in this environment, the next set of challenges include organizing, warranting, and rewarding human effort.

### *MLA Scholarly Communication Initiative*

Kathleen Fitzpatrick asserted that the new Scholarly Communication office at the Modern Language Association is less about "building new digital things" than about adapting to a new environment in order to sustain ongoing work of and conversations among MLA members. The program operates within a large, prestigious scholarly society that is grappling with the changing nature of membership. MLA's goals are to reset the association's book publishing and editorial functions in the context of the Web; and to think prospectively about born-digital materials that members will need over time. It will leverage existing technologies and platforms, at present using [CUNY's Commons-in-a-Box](#). On the one hand, the program focuses on the pragmatic work of facilitating existing formal groups (e.g., committees) and functions (e.g., the organization's

annual convention). On the other, it sees an opportunity to support ad hoc groups of members who come together around a specific shared interest for a limited time. It has so far had great success in experiments such as the [New Variorum Shakespeare Digital Challenge](#), which provides members incentives to develop creative uses of digital content created and sponsored by the MLA.

In contrast to the other two projects, which are self-consciously defined as experiments that draw collaborators already committed to change, MLA's program begins where so many scholarly societies do—with anxieties about the changing nature of membership organizations, their business models, and how to build, sustain, and demonstrate value in the digital environment. The core asset of scholarly societies is prestige, but it is proving remarkably challenging to use that asset wisely in a volatile environment.

Challenges: getting buy-in from a community that ranges from early adopters of technology to those indifferent to or hesitant about digital authoring and publishing. Concern that some users may experience “profile fatigue” from the need to maintain yet another digital identity in order to work on yet another platform to engage yet another community.

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Together, this trio of projects brings forward twinned themes of desire and fear. Desire motivates those who see opportunities to be seized; and fear prompts others to ask what problems we are trying to solve. As each project develops iteratively, these tensions emerge over and over. It is through the process of iteration—doing and learning and opening up projects for critical examination—that tensions between desire and fear are negotiated. Discussions revealed that scholars are often torn between the desire to do something innovative, with high impact, and the fear that doing so will retard their career prospects or worse, not even be recognized. Organizations that support humanities scholarship—libraries, presses, scholarly societies—want the opportunity to reconstitute themselves for continued relevance in the digital environment. But they fear the risk of redefining their mission, undercutting their current business models, and becoming marginalized or worse, going out of business.

In addition to specific feedback provided to the projects, general discussions at our SCI meeting revolved around: communities, audiences, and publics; new work modes such as collaboration or iteration (such as punctuated publishing of work-in-progress to gather feedback); and the human, technical, and organizational infrastructure this work demands.

### **Audiences, Communities, Publics**

How do scholars conceive of the audiences with whom they are communicating, the publics they wish to engage, and how communication takes advantage of horizontal vectors of the Web without ignoring—or being ignored—by the academy? The desire to flatten the vertical hierarchies of credentialing native to the academy—promotion and tenure—roots the ambitions and anxieties of the digital humanities. PressForward and ANVC start from the premise that peer review is in essence a horizontal exchange among peers, embedded within specific scholarly communities. So that is where they begin. Their experiments reconfigure processes of vetting, commenting, and assessment, and consider how each unit of these processes—like a comment to a blog that becomes a key critical intervention, or a tweet that becomes a vector of attention and influence—can be appropriately acknowledged and normalized within commonly accepted

scholarly practices.

MLA and other scholarly societies begin at the other end of the social spectrum: the community, with its highly standardized behaviors and expectations. Societies are where practices are normalized and assigned tokens of legitimacy or prestige through in-house publications, speaking slots at conferences, and so forth. Change is held to a deliberate pace to ensure that no member is left behind. As MLA's Scholarly Communications initiative amply demonstrates, societies' desire to democratize their passion for domain expertise and their commitment to high intellectual and ethical standards pushes them to the Web as an optimal shared platform. Although this may be an inevitable strategy, it is not without risk, for on the one hand they risk not moving fast enough for those already "digitally-enabled"—and on the other, too fast for everyone else.

One solution to the variable tolerance for change among membership is to emphasize that community is created by participation, and so to offer varying degrees of participation. There was disagreement in the SCI group about how that variation is best dealt with and signaled. If [alternative academic professionals](#) and an interested public audience demand "full citizenship" in this polity, how are we to award different modes of participation? These groups are deemed crucial to the success of scholarly societies online, especially the large ones that serve an entire domain—history, literature, religion—rather than a sub-domain. As one participant asked, if you are not a citizen—if you don't come in through peer review—how can you belong to that community? Others pushed back and noted that the very premise of the question runs against the spirit of openness that animates online scholarly engagement.

For their part, ANVC and PressForward are keenly aware that community is defined by participation and that participation comes in many forms, is voiced in many registers, and resides in varying temporalities or time scales. They pointedly focus on parsing these matters, in order to force scholarly self-reflection and shape scholarly practices emerging in the online environment. They desire to leverage participation, to mobilize individuals to evaluate and credential both work and people. [NINES](#) was cited as an early example of a system in which scholarly assessment includes the degree to which a project facilitates interoperability and growth of the community (e.g., via use of standards and linked open data). As for the criteria by which one reviews and warrants good scholarship, some wanted to draw a distinction between impact, which PressForward consciously tracks, and "quality," a term that resists definition in the kind of mixed company required to build shared systems, and which was exemplified by the participants in this meeting. Even nomenclature becomes a topic of discussion and a source of potential misunderstanding in groups that include scholars, software developers, designers, librarians, and publishers, all with particular disciplinary orientations. But comparisons with systems foreign to humanities as a whole can be useful. [PLoS ONE](#) offers an instructive example of how to understand the relationship between impact and quality and just how separable they may or may not be. It publishes scientific literature that has been vetted for accuracy and soundness of methodology, eliding the matter of quality and impact. PLoS ONE takes the following stance on peer review:

"Too often a journal's decision to publish a paper is dominated by what the Editor/s think is interesting and will gain greater readership — both of which are subjective judgments and lead to decisions which are frustrating and delay the publication of your work. *PLoS ONE* will rigorously peer-review your submissions and publish all papers that are judged to be technically sound. Judgments about the importance of any particular paper are then made after publication by the readership (who are the most qualified to determine what is

of interest to them).”<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the natural sciences, humanities scholarship has what has been called a “long tail,” an extended temporal dimension in which value can endure and accrue. We can reasonably assume that impact and perceptions of quality will and should fluctuate significantly over decades and centuries. In discursive communities, enduring value is composed of impact and quality in varying and often surprising degrees.

Self-constituted *communities* of scholars, not individuals, award attention and are the adjudicators of impact. This pushes our focus onto the overall systems logic at work, more than on the specifics of each project. It is the scholarly communication system as a whole that needs to constitute a recognized authority. PressForward is looking in particular at the role played by the filtering of attention in constituting authority. The project was commended for “not creating a sense of crisis, in terms of defining new things as they emerge” but for treating new genres as natural variants that will live or die according to how well they meet scholars’ needs. Indeed, the advantage of such projects as PressForward and ANVC is that they situate themselves in a scholarly community and live outside of sustaining organizations—libraries, presses, and societies—and thus obviate the concern that experimentation and modeling of new communication channels and renewed communities are themselves destabilizing.

### Academic Workflow

ANVC’s projects, developed on Scalar, demonstrate that workflow can serve as a natural way to bring communities together. The processes of research, analysis, interpretation, curation, and presentation flow into one another in a digital environment. This fact has enormous implications for the kinds of expertise that must be brought to bear in the production of knowledge. Expert communities can and must talk to each other across professional lines, in the collaborations that evolve from scholarly pursuits in the digital environment. The critical question for the scholarly labor force is how to prepare future humanities-trained librarians, IT professionals, publishers, scholars, and administrators for collaborative knowledge production. The current labor force does not match organizational needs, and the pipeline is far from full. In libraries and research centers, this void is being partially met by a variety of post-doctoral programs that provide internship experience to highly-skilled scholars not pursuing tenure-track professorships. Publishers do not have similar mentoring programs and access to a labor force of alternative academics (alt-ac professionals). What would make for ideal professional development tracks for humanities students wishing to move into libraries and presses?

Considering that over 60 research libraries now offer some kind of publishing services, this question has salience and even suggests that there might be a natural alliance to be cultivated. But the core ethos of libraries as service organizations with a long time horizon and commitment to their home institutions conflicts with the mission of presses, which are focused on near-term value and effectively allied to disciplines and scholarly groups but seldom to their home institutions. However, these boundaries are breaking down rapidly (as witnessed by the proliferation of publishing activities on the part of libraries). For financial reasons, some presses are becoming more service-oriented; at the same time, libraries are increasingly being asked to cover their costs in order to subsidize services provided to faculty. Presses fear that becoming too service-oriented toward institutional faculty and students results in mission creep that will erode

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.plosone.org/static/information.action>



their business models. Libraries fear financial pressures to recoup costs will erode their service mission.

This possible inversion of roles brings the subject back to audiences and publics. Book production is “essential, but privileged” and also a relatively recent phenomenon. Other long-standing and formerly well-rewarded activities such as curation, editing, and critical review are coming back to the fore as the vast body of cultural production in all media migrates online.

### **Infrastructure**

These projects focus on curation, selection, re-intermediation, and on engaging users as readers, commenters, and annotators. The desire for projects that demand collaboration to achieve their potential summons forth “[a new hermeneutic](#).” This new hermeneutic resides less within an individual point of view and more in “collaborative creation and tacit knowledge exchange.” It enables distant reading across projects and datasets as well as deep reading within them, and derives its intellectual and social powers from enabling system behavior, not only individual behavior.

To some extent, this hermeneutic not only demands a new digital infrastructure but helps to bring it about. In light of the scholarly practices emerging as natural behaviors in the digital realm, the professional staffs of libraries, research centers, societies, and presses should come from research communities and must continue to develop professionally within them. Breaking down long-held distinctions between service organizations and research organizations is not a problem—on the contrary, it is a solution to the challenge of providing infrastructure for the digital environment. The [Scholars’ Lab](#) at the University of Virginia Library exemplifies the new environment in which scholars work with professional “knowledge workers,” many of them self-identified alt-ac professionals. They are allowed 20% of their time to devote to research; this allows them to be productive as collaborators, not simply service providers. If such centers become largely about consultation to faculty and maintenance of services, some argued, we will inadvertently replicate obsolete distinctions between research and teaching faculty and other professionals crucial to knowledge production.

This new model of professional development may take different organizational forms on different campuses, some situated in libraries and some in distinct research centers. Duke University is starting the [Digital Knowledge Lab](#) that will cycle people through a variety of training and learning roles. The Scholars’ Lab has also instituted the [Praxis Program](#), which focuses specifically on collaborative knowledge production. The crucial question for scholarly communication infrastructure is how to scale the human and technical expertise found in a center like the Scholars’ Lab across institutions. When the group thought about points of leverage for change within existing infrastructure, they focused on scale and systems. The consensus was that not all universities will have knowledge production centers; in that sense, they will not be analogous to the one-campus-one-library system. There will be an archipelago of such centers, each with distinct expertise, that can and should be federated through one mechanism or another.

Infrastructure must be pragmatic in its approach to opportunities, for in the end, infrastructure must make things work, and must also sustain them over time. There is an inherent tension between providing latitude for innovation and ensuring sustainability over long intervals of time. The key to building infrastructure that is sustainable is to ensure it can be used across multiple communities; this can be accomplished in part by taking advantage of such technologies as the semantic Web and linked open data. In thinking about a platform such as Scalar, the librarian who takes the long view will think about Scalar as supported on the back end by libraries. The



question becomes one of recognizing when an experiment is one-of-a-kind, as opposed to the first-of-a-kind. Normalization can only occur over time, but Scalar is keenly aware that it must be widely used by scholarly communities to achieve sustainability. Therefore, from the beginning it has worked closely with scholars and sustaining organizations such as archives and presses. Its strategy has been to start working with scholars where they are and build out from there, toward methodological training, research, and workflows that start in archives with throughput to presses.

As new modes of scholarly communication emerge together with the infrastructures that will support them, so does the opportunity for scholars and research institutions to “recapture ownership of knowledge production.” Whatever the fate of these individual projects, their value at this juncture is to test assumptions about online scholarship, about the nature of research and learning, about systems that support specialized investigations as well as distant reading. They already suggest productive ways to recalibrate graduate training and professional development, and to create new organizational alignments. Each project fits into a system of scholarly communication that is still under development and, given the nature of the digital, will be changing and developing long into the future. In grasping the sharp edges of invention, complexity, and diversity that characterize products of human creativity, they continue the long practice of critical reflection that has always propelled the humanities into the future.



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### Scholarly Production and Authoring

Institute of International Education, New York, NY

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## **SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE**

### **Scholarly Production and Authoring**

**Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media  
George Mason University, Fairfax, VA**

**February 28-March 1, 2013**

**Abby Smith Rumsey, Director  
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#### ***Background***

The Scholarly Communication Institute (SCI) is convening a series of meetings to explore three in-progress projects that are modeling and testing new modes of scholarly production and authoring: [MLACommons](#); [PressForward](#); and the [Alliance for Networking Visual Culture](#). Working openly and iteratively, they are reconfiguring humanities discourse for a world in which scholarship, like culture, is created and experienced online.

This report presents the results of the second of three meetings. (The [report](#) from the first meeting of May 2012 gives a more detailed description of the projects and their goals.) [Participants](#) came from different sectors of the humanities and sciences, ranging from librarians and publishers to scholars and learned society administrators. Discussions focused on how scholarly authority is constituted: which communities participate; how assessment and review are conducted; what are the signals of quality and accuracy; and what is the “path to acceptance” for the scholarship produced.

These projects are generative, opening a window onto the future of scholarly communication and inviting people to use the models in their own knowledge domains. Rather than parsing how these experiments might fit into the current—largely broken—system, we imagined how humanities disciplines and their supporting infrastructure would grow up around, and be reconfigured by, these modes of knowledge production and sharing. We pictured the process of integrating digital technologies into humanities unfolding somewhat as feminism did in the last century. In that instance, a powerful social phenomenon in the world beyond campus was incorporated into higher education in a number of ways, starting with disciplines. When fully metabolized, it had a broader transformational effect on structures and relations in the academy.

## **Challenges to Acceptance**

### *MLA Commons*

MLA Commons reverses the polarities of value the Modern Language Association offers to its members. The Commons provides participants a way to develop an audience through process-oriented discussion and engagement, rather than providing a platform (like the annual convention) to present one's polished work to an existing audience. This in-process mode can be perceived as a threat to one's professional persona. But the benefit MLA offers is not only its long-standing role of access to expertise, but also a place where scholars can draw attention to their work, seek review and vetting, and build an audience. MLA Commons invites member to be more than passive recipients of publications and become active participants in the development of the society's conversations. The challenge is to take existing prestige and authority and move it into a more productive and less formal mode of discourse among members, and effect this transition without putting unsustainable pressure on members' time.

### *PressForward*

PressForward is designed to surface new voices and give visibility to good scholarship wherever it comes from. It begins with "Web-first" scholarship and uses a pyramid-shaped editorial structure to filter content on the Web. At its first stage PressForward combines automated metrics with human judgment to sift through thousands of items, republishing the highest-quality pieces in [DHNNow](#) without further editing. It is extremely difficult for an article to pass through the editorial crucible in [DHNNow](#), a model that can present content relevant to specific fields; and even more difficult to reach the next stage, in the quarterly [Journal of Digital Humanities](#). An outstanding challenge is to tell the story of why work thus selected is "CV-worthy."

### *Alliance for Networking Visual Culture (ANVC)*

ANVC is a community-building enterprise that brings together scholars, scholarly societies, humanities centers, librarians and archivists, programmers and designers, and publishers in a common workflow to create multimedia scholarship through the [Scalar](#) platform. The salient challenge to having multimedia work accepted and rewarded is the novelty of having data and interpretive models cohabit. Acculturating communities that are used to making text-based arguments—even those studying multimedia—to multimedia authoring and reading requires teaching a new kind of literacy. The platform and how it works must be transparent and legible. But the deeper challenge to acceptance is the default mode in research universities to undervalue pedagogy and resource-creating or field-building activities and overweighting research-based scholarship. ANVC does not accept the validity of this hierarchy and has designed Scalar to encourage all three activities.

## **Labor and Reward**

The warranting of good scholarship is separate from the system of reward for good scholarship. But they have been conflated through habit, so that a book

from a particular press has become a powerful token of quality and a necessary prerequisite for promotion or tenure. Yet clinging to old models can subvert good scholarship. For example, science relies on the testing of hypotheses through evidence gathering, experimentation, testing, and sharing the results broadly. In certain fields of science, though, there is a growing sense of crisis because a significant body of research results published in prestigious journals cannot be reproduced, while negative results remain unpublished and unknown. This is largely because the system is set up to reward positive results and punish negative results.

There are analogies in humanities scholarship, where the incentives push scholars into researching and producing single-authored publications, while field-building activities and pedagogy are deemed less prestigious. Yet pedagogy is the single mission of higher education that has widely recognized social value, and the humanities would stagnate without field-building activities such as editing, building sharable databases, and developing tools (often lumped together as service). This skewed reward system is one factor in the erosion of trust in higher education, an erosion evidenced by leaders of both political parties continuing to question its economic models and social value. These projects have the virtue of exposing the fault lines between the sum of expert labor that goes into building, sustaining, and disseminating knowledge and the more narrow system of rewarding research above field-building activities.

In digital scholarship, at least at this juncture, much effort is put into building resources and tools that can be used by others. Moreover, much like scholarship itself, these resources and tools are never fixed, but rather are dynamic and customizable. ANVC and MLACommons shed bright light on how the modes of constructing and sharing knowledge are collaborative and the process of creating and sharing knowledge always dynamic. Hence the emphasis of process over product in digital scholarship. The focus on process raises questions about how to clarify to peers what scholarly labor goes into the process—how to make that labor more visible and legible—and how to acknowledge and reward that labor.

Both MLACommons and PressForward place a premium on participation. Scholars need to show up in a public space in order to be counted, putting your ideas forward far more openly than in prior modes of scholarly communication. PressForward has some preliminary evidence to suggest the introduction of gender bias here—for instance, that open writing like blogging is preponderantly a male activity—whereas the editorial processes show much greater participation by women. A second issue that has arisen is how to value different the kinds of labor involved in participation. Because of the nonprofit nature of higher education, the labor put into these activities is not directly compensated. It is often misleadingly called "gift labor," when in reality participants are financially supported by their home institutions through salaries, stipends, and so forth. Labor and reward imbalances are compounded by the fact that critical supporting institutions, such as libraries and presses, do not have staff with the skills needed for these new kinds of work.



This is where the undervalued element of pedagogy can solve many problems. While students and interns are often used as auxiliary labor for lower-skilled tasks, in the digital environment they can play a different role. They often bring technical skills that their older colleagues do not have, thus adding essential expertise. At the same time, they can acquire experience in building a new knowledge environment, feel invested in its success and become well-versed in the ways and means of such scholarship at an early stage of their careers. Engaging students in digital scholarly production and authoring is a good way both to recruit talent and to build an audience for this work.

PressForward engages a large number of graduate students, junior scholars, and scholars in so-called “alternative” careers (such as libraries and museums) in the work of sifting Web-first scholarship. They start with automated means of sorting when possible, in the interests of efficiency, then add a layer of human vetting for quality. After all, the point is not to recognize the most active scholar-bloggers, but the best. The blended model spreads the workload and incorporates a broader swath of domain expertise by tapping special editors for certain editions of *DHNow* and the journal.

### ***Signals of Quality and How to Read Them***

The question then becomes one of how to recognize, assess, and award scholarly labor some token or signal recognizable in the reward system of higher education. What are the new tokens of quality emerging from these new models for knowledge production? How do we explain what the authority is and how it works, and how do we develop signals that are more legible?

MLACommons is working to port existing understandings of legitimacy and prestige into a new venue that is more informal; and to develop within that system legible signals of quality and merit. This will be one of its essential tasks in the near future, as it gathers more data about how people are behaving in and perceiving MLACommons. In the cases of ANVC and PressForward, project principals have been stepping forward to provide additional information and explanation about this work to a variety of assessment and evaluative bodies. They present frequently on their work at professional conferences, write letters on behalf of people whose work in this arena is up for assessment, and network across disciplines to learn more about how other fields have forged paths of acceptance.

Participants had a spirited debate about the virtues and vices of design, developmental editing, copyediting, and house styles. As legacies of the print world, these distinctive features of presentation tend to be conflated and serve as shorthand for quality itself. In fact, their significance is considerably more nuanced, as these projects show. Design, for example, which can be extremely time-consuming, may very well be integral to a scholarly argument in a Scalar piece. Not so for PressForward. It is agnostic about the design and the editing, taking content in the format it appears on the Web for the sake of economy and timeliness. Design and editing are crafts that signal how much time and attention a given product or process has commanded. Sometimes fit and finish matter immensely, and sometimes—particularly in more time sensitive and

informal communication—they can serve as chokepoints. But that relationship needs to be re-articulated in the digital arena. Because the compact between author and reader is still being worked out in digital scholarship, it is better to clarify upfront what expectations readers should bring to a site. PressForward is not nested within an authoritative body such as a scholarly society and has used its vantage point to embrace a more casual approach to styling editing for the purposes of broadening its perspective horizons. MLACommons, by contrast, is uniquely positioned to develop an online space for serious critical and developmental editing.

A note on metrics: recognizing that we need machine-readable systems to help us find and evaluate good scholarship, let us be very careful about choosing our metrics. Studies have shown that people perform to whatever metrics there are, and that within a predictably short period of time, people can game these metrics. One of the lessons learned by PressForward is that whatever system of metrics they use, they require constant human attention—such as looking for gender bias in participation, or perceiving that sometimes the most popular is not the best in terms of scholarship. We need to be able to adapt metrics according to what we find. The challenge of developing and maintaining metrics only reinforces the view that scholarship is iterative and dynamic. And data need to be accompanied by narratives that explain the context and value of the data (as [ImpactStory](#) is making possible).

### ***Scale, Scalability, & Persistence***

The two related but distinct challenges of scale (how large or small the parameters of an activity to be successful) and scalability (how elements of the an activity are adopted and adapted over time and across distances) are hard to assess at this juncture. The projects are designed to model and test processes and modes of working and will fade away as the models themselves are absorbed into the larger body of scholarship. But each project began with a strong sense of the assumptions that are being tested. For example, MLACommons deals with the matter of scale within a closed—or at least, self-limiting—system. We know that participation is a key to success, but do not yet know what level of participation will reveal itself (in retrospect) to be the tipping point. Because neither ANVC nor PressForward are discipline-specific, they are greatly advantaged by being very porous, encouraging not only interdisciplinary work, but also the ability for one domain of knowledge to adopt and adapt Scalar or PressForward for their own activities. Imitation or replication in different domains will be a signal of success. (Adaptions within unforeseen domains is already occurring.) In fact, precisely because they build communities first and engage participants in building the scholarly system itself, they are proving themselves to be excellent sites for helping emerging communities of discourse and practice to coalesce and mature.

In terms of scalability, all three projects raise questions in the minds of librarians, whose role in scholarly communication is to ensure the ongoing access to scholarship over time. Librarians ask if they looking at one-of-a-kind versus first-of-a-kind models of communication. If the latter, how are they to integrate these workflows into library workflows? These questions cannot be

answered in the near-term, but they raise general questions for libraries (and presses as well) as they reorganize their labor and infrastructure for digital scholarship. There are also catalytic roles for humanities centers and scholarly societies to play here, at least in terms of surfacing, assessing, and validating new scholarship. MLACommons may prove a powerful exemplar to other societies of moving informal discourse and community formation online. If so, the present work should be extensible, not requiring a scholarly society to institute its own version independent of others. (These projects will all have their code available on GitHub, the hosting service for open source projects that enables easy reuse and modification.) It would be important as well to ensure that a scholar could develop an online profile able to operate across multiple sites, such as scholarly society commons, Scalar and Scalar-like platforms, and various PressForward sites.

Scalability is often a prerequisite for persistence, both in terms of taking advantage of technological economies of scale, and in making the best use of people's time. It is not hard to see that scholars will turn away from MLACommons or related platforms if they require constant repetition of such things as building a profile. These projects raise the issue not only on the new lifecycle of digital scholarship, but also the new lifecycle of digital scholars, who will be building portfolios that should be tailored for use in multiple online environments.

As a rule, taking advantage of economies of scale requires normalization of content types and of workflow. As such, it comes at a price. Scalar, for example, which in its present phase promotes innovation and customization in the interests of opening up the scholarly imagination and building bridges between scholars, presses, and archives, will face some painful trade-offs in the coming years as its long-term archival and press partners require normalization of practices that scholars may wish to keep open.

### ***Effecting Change***

The following steps can accelerate change, build bridges among disciplines, help mitigate risks to individual scholars who pursue this work, and offer incentives to continue redesigning scholarly communication:

- incentivize experimentation through targeted funding
- design inter-generational experiments so that innovative work can be more readily assessed by senior colleagues
- include letters of equivalence in portfolios to make the value of such work more transparent to colleagues
- offer prizes and awards to draw attention to best practices and scholarship in new modes
- keep governance of new models loose for as long as possible to allow for iteration along the way to maturity
- involve advisory boards comprising expertise beyond core constituencies to gain visibility and serve as a reality check
- develop narratives that provide context for new metrics and new modes of scholarship

- continue to extend communities of practice through sustained communication

Systemic change takes time and patience. Above all, it demands leadership at all levels, from junior scholars to senior administrators. At times like this, the inherent tension between serving one's career and serving one's field is exacerbated. But to achieve seniority in a field at the expense of the social enterprise that makes the field possible is counterproductive at best. By contrast, those who work to build and refresh fields for the digital age can finesse that tension by becoming indispensable to the very scholarly communication system they participate in creating.



## **SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE**

**Scholarly Production & Authoring, Meeting 2**  
**Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media**  
**George Mason University, Fairfax, VA**

**February 28–March 1, 2013**

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## **SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE**

### **Meeting on Scholarly Production and Authoring**

#### **From Projects to Communities of Practice**

**School of Cinematic Arts  
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA  
May 21-22, 2013**

**Abby Smith Rumsey, Director  
Scholarly Communication Institute**

#### ***Background***

The Scholarly Communication Institute (SCI) has convened three meetings to examine projects that are modeling and testing new modes of scholarly production and authoring: [PressForward](#), aggregating and highlighting web-based humanities scholarship, led by [Dan Cohen](#); [MLA Commons](#), leveraging digital technologies for members of the Modern Language Association (MLA), led by [Kathleen Fitzpatrick](#); and the [Alliance for Networking Visual Culture](#), partnering scholars, archives, presses, scholarly societies, and humanities centers dedicated to online visual scholarship, led by [Tara McPherson](#). Collectively these projects breach the boundaries that demarcate humanities scholarly publishing in the print era by looking beyond reflexive distinctions between formal and informal publications. They aim to integrate the process of research and writing with the products of research and writing, and to leverage the capacities of web-based discourse to foster scholarship that is created, experienced, and evaluated online.

The focus of this session was on transition from experimental models to adoption by communities of practice and, ultimately, normalization within institutions such as libraries, publishers, and scholarly societies. This report summarizes the third and final of these meetings, and highlights results that have implications for digital scholarly practices far beyond the projects and the disciplines from which they emerge. (Reports from meetings in [May 2012](#) and [February 2013](#) provide detailed descriptions of the projects and their developments to date.) [Participants](#) came from different sectors of the

humanities and sciences, ranging from librarians and publishers to scholars and learned society administrators.

Discussions centered around three key points of transition in the life of these enterprises:

1. *Scaling growth*: How self-selected groups of innovators move beyond early adopters to enlist core constituents of disciplines.
2. *Developing business models*: How innovative projects go from creating user demand to operationalizing business models that ensure reliable revenues.
3. *Adoption and normalization*: How practices modeled in an explicitly experimental mode become normalized within sustaining institutions (e. g., libraries, publishers, scholarly societies) that require standards and best practices to achieve efficiencies.

Participants considered these points in light of the essential values embedded in these projects and the dynamic environment in which they are taking root.

These enterprises were designed to test concepts and model new practices, not erect permanent structures. Therefore, planning next steps began with consideration of the primary utility users found in PressForward, ANVC and its authoring platform Scalar, and MLA Commons. The uses made of the new services provided insight into which parts of a given project should be further developed and by whom, which allowed to fade away, and which will need reliable sources of revenue.

Periodic assessments are integral to these projects. PressForward, for example, conducted [user surveys](#). ANVC has convened meetings periodically to hear from disciplinary and organizational groups. MLA Commons formally debuted in January 2013 and is still in early stages; they will undertake assessment in due course. Not unexpectedly, some of the value found to be inherent in these models were unanticipated by their founders.

## **Scholarly Value**

### *PressForward*

What do readers of [DHNow](#) and the [Journal of Digital Humanities](#) (JDH) want? Cohen reported that the primary values are that the platform is web-based (hence very accessible), open, and easy to use. These particular features have unlocked a great deal of good will and recruited a large base of volunteer editorial help. Beyond that, users value the quality of the scholarship in JDH above frequency of publication. Both the variety of topics and exposure to diverse subjects and approaches in JDH, together with the developmental editing that occurs around the journal, ranked highly. This labor-intensive editing is what traditional journal publishing provides in abundance and comes with a much higher “entry barrier” than the digesting of materials that happens through *DHNow*. The spectrum of review and attention, beginning with largely automated procedures for highlighting content in *DHNow* to intensive selection and editing processes in the journal, is the salient virtue of PressForward’s

approach to web-first publishing. It has been an ideal way to test ways scholars can cope with a surfeit of web-accessible content. Finally, this enterprise shows how important it is for any service to have a ready answer to what Cohen dubbed the “Ghostbuster question.” When something goes wrong, who is the user going to call?

#### *MLA Commons*

MLA Commons is part of a larger strategy of the MLA to leverage the strengths of the web for its members. It is moving core business to the web, conducting administrative and committee work online in order to use people’s time more efficiently. And it is beginning to distribute its signature publications online. They chose to release the anthology *Digital Literary Studies* on the web rather than in print, as MLA sees an anthology as an inherently dynamic genre that needs to reflect the latest developments in scholarship. Fitzpatrick noted that the Commons platform was so quickly adopted by certain groups it seemed as if they had been waiting for it to organize themselves for communication. One future goal is to facilitate the dissemination and storage of members’ own scholarship, thereby shifting the benefits of membership from providing access to a small number of carefully selected and edited works (via a journal) toward the possibility of broad distribution of a wider range of research. The enthusiasm of early adopters aside, it is not clear yet what will constitute the critical mass that signals the platform is ready to turn over to MLA members. What appears to be of most value in these early stages is the autonomy and flexibility that the platform provides people who wish to conduct their scholarly and administrative business under the aegis of a prestigious society.

#### *ANVC*

ANVC has reached out to recruit organizations and individuals that play a role at each stage of scholarly production and authoring: individual scholars and the societies to which they belong, archives that house visual materials, university presses that publish visual scholarship, and humanities centers where scholars and students from across different disciplines convene. What is most valued by those in the orbit of ANVC is the community itself, in addition, of course, to the platform that they work on, Scalar. McPherson and her colleagues are focused on moving the community of visual scholarship itself forward. They see the Alliance as a pipeline for scholarly communication using visual materials, a pipeline that is not just of new scholars, but also of new archivists, librarians, and publishers. They work with the understanding that Scalar—or any platform, for that matter—is likely to be improved and ultimately superseded over time. That said, they report that Scalar has been used for unanticipated purposes such as pedagogy, communal writing projects, and as an “ideation space.” It has been adopted by scholars in anthropology and religion, among others, because of their reliance on visual materials.

### **External influences**

Two external factors were cited as particularly significant in considering future directions for these enterprises: the reconfiguration of division of labor that occurs in the digital realm; and the political and economic challenges to higher education. The first factor points to the well-documented phenomenon,

sometimes called disintermediation, that on the web, vertically-integrated enterprises such as journalism or film and music production find their goods and services are now "unbundled." The means of production and distribution are easily separated. In scholarship, this phenomenon is visible in the changing roles and responsibilities of each player in the chain of scholarly communication. As ANVC demonstrates so vividly, scholarly communication is iterated through a work flow that touches scholars (as creators), archives (as points of access to source materials), presses (as editors and disseminators), libraries (as point of access to scholarship), and scholars again (as researchers and teachers). The roles and responsibilities of each are now reconfigured, often radically. Scholars become more entrepreneurial and can find audiences directly online, bypassing presses. Libraries are left struggling to acquire informally published digital scholarship and render it preservable over time. The changing (often escalating) expectations placed by students and scholars and local service providers (such as libraries or digital laboratories) can seldom be met on one campus. While there is a consensus that a distributed network provides a way to address this uneven distribution of capacity by coordinating institutions with complementary strengths, effecting such collaborations is daunting. Robust examples such as [Internet2](#) and [Kuali](#) have so far not proven easily translatable for the humanities, a cluster of disciplines which see themselves as retail operations. Shifting to the mindset of a wholesale provider of digital capacities for humanistic disciplines will take time. The three projects that constituted the focal point of the meeting offer a spectrum of creative models that demonstrate how such interdisciplinary and inter-institutional configurations operate and what they can achieve.

What will be the new alignments among these actors, particularly as we see increased blurring between formal and informal publishing, as well as between critical discourse about and curation of primary source material? What does it mean for presses and libraries when we now locate scholarly contributions within the processes of communication, rather than solely in a final published product? What, for example, will academic presses make of PressForward? Will they integrate it into their workflow, looking at it as a way of sifting through scholarship for projects they may wish to bring into production? Or will they view the fruits of PressForward as irrelevant? And how will libraries grapple with their traditional role as collector and steward of scholarly resources of long-term value when value is situated in the process rather than product of communication? These questions about publishing workflows and preservation have yet to be solved by other industries, such as film or recorded sound.

The second environmental factor influencing the ultimate outcomes of these three enterprises is what one participant called the "hollowing out" of higher education in the United States; that is, the diminishment of public support in the midst of growing demand to educate more people, more inexpensively, and while also lowering barriers to accessing scholarship—even in the absence of copyright reform. More broadly, we are seeing a hollowing out of the public domain, the shared information commons that has been the conceptual bedrock of the knowledge enterprise at least since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The ethic of sharing scholarship freely is not new, but the digital deceptively promises that the upfront costs can effectively melt away. This does not make it any less

expensive to produce or disseminate scholarship, just harder to charge for it. The widely inclusive nature of access on the web—access to content but also to the means of production and distribution—demands much higher investment in digital information infrastructure and higher education than the public sector has yet made.

At the same time, we see demand for new skills and competencies with respect to teaching, research, librarianship, and publishing. We can anticipate fewer tenured faculty, probably smaller graduate programs, and the growth of “blended” teaching and learning. Large parts of a given curriculum will be delivered to students not in the classroom but remotely, asynchronously online. One participant lamented that the structures of the academy are less adaptable than they were even 10 years ago as universities continue to strip down structures. Fortunately, to the extent that these three projects use the web to make the humanities accessible and transparent to the public, they may increase interest in and support of the humanities. These projects effectively increase the autonomy of users, giving them greater control over the use of their time and attention. This increased sense of autonomy is at the core of their attractiveness to users. However, we do not yet know what the ultimate cost of such autonomy will be over time. Some noted their concern that the open environment which enables autonomy has been exploited by technology industries to monetize not just personal information, but also the core products of higher education—new knowledge and the passions of curious, critically engaged citizens.

### **Scaling growth**

As the project directors look at extending the reach of their work through federation or spin-offs, they are cautious about finding ways to do so without creating distributed networks that force high overhead costs. PressForward could imagine a future in which they would continue as a journal or be absorbed into a larger publishing entity that uses PressForward as part of their acquisition process. Cohen and his team have already seen scholarly communities adapting PressForward for their own purposes (e.g., [DH+Lib](#), which is modeled on the *DHNow* system), so they know it will scale through spin-offs and imitators. MLA Commons is contemplating a hub-and-spoke model of federation so that other scholarly societies can work off the same back-end and possibly co-invest in shared infrastructure, such as repositories, in the future. Each project has been careful to date to cultivate non-monetary rewards that act as powerful tokens of value in the academy, tokens that signify prestige and reputation, by awarding prizes, for example, and developing model language for their users to present their work to colleagues and departments. ANVC is adding new partner presses, archives, centers, and societies at a measured pace.

Growth in internal capacity as well as external reach is critical if these projects will move from a group of committed builders and leaders to groups of users who value the practices and share the vision of the founders. Project directors and their core teams of collaborators will need strategies to delegate major responsibilities, mentor leaders at each level of responsibility, and ensure that

the core ethos of the project—its major goals, but also the values inherent to the original vision—is clearly articulated and guides each aspect of development. All three of these projects face the challenge of succession from the core group of founders to the next generation of people who will take responsibility for further development. Part of the attraction that these projects hold for those working with them is the large scope an individual has for professional and personal development. This is akin to the special aura of start-ups in a dynamic environment rife with unknown potentials and hazards. Along similar lines, these enterprises will soon face the same organizational point of inflection that renowned start-ups such as Wikipedia, Google, or Facebook have passed through. Maturation demands the development of business models that ensure revenues over time, the recruitment of new leadership, and the resolution to carry a vision into the future, long after the novelty of innovation has worn off and room for improvisation and experiment diminishes.

### **Developing business models**

While scholars and students in the startup phases are often willing to commit their labor in return for non-monetary rewards, these projects will require secure funding for dedicated staff, among other things, sooner rather than later. No matter how valuable the learning experience or fantastic the resulting work, running systems off the unpaid labor of students and non-tenured faculty is unacceptable as a way of doing business. How do we generate ethically-sourced revenues to sustain open and dynamic systems of knowledge creation and sharing? Previously in the pre-digital academy, the primary users (students and scholars) have been represented in the system by proxy organizations (such as libraries) authorized and funded to purchase goods and services on their behalf. As scholars behave increasingly like entrepreneurs, the capacity of proxy organizations to be effective is diminishing, even as scholarly societies (such as MLA), with their smaller financial base and administrative capacities, are stepping in. Perhaps this is merely a transitional phenomenon. Further, while the increased demand for public access to the fruits of teaching and research is not matched by increased supply of public monies, there are more funds flowing into undergraduate education, particularly those features that prepare students for citizenship and work in the digital age (by teaching digital literacies, for example, or quantitative reasoning). Ultimately, embedding these enterprises within the institutions of higher education appears a logical and sound way to support their continued value. The project directors are tracking the uses of their products in order to understand better what incentives—such as pedagogical uses or increased efficiencies—they can offer to an organization.

### **Adoption and normalization**

Sustainability of scholarship—at least to the extent that it is not a private good—relies on keeping the costs of creation and curation down while ensuring that the return on the initial investments can be enjoyed well into the future. Only organizations with a long time horizon can provide such insurance. Though libraries and presses are feeling great pressure to do more with less, they are well-positioned to be the sites where new roles and responsibilities come together again to create efficiencies, in one fashion or another. There may be



fewer presses and libraries in the future, as there may be fewer humanities faculty and smaller graduate programs.

But when time comes to make a lasting contribution to the record of scholarship, scholars will turn to professionals to manage that information into the future. The example of the [SAHARA](#) database of architectural images, a project of the Society of Architectural Historians, shows that scholars who contribute images and metadata are best served by partnering with a librarian from the beginning. SAHARA enables the matchmaking. Note, too, in that example that the enabling organization is a scholarly society. Both societies and humanities centers have, in specific cases, been key in helping to publicize and make connections across disciplines and across generations. While they lack the institutional heft and funding of libraries and presses, they have intellectual and social prestige as well as the considerable advantage of flexibility. If they choose to, they can play uniquely important roles in this period of experimentation and transition.

### **Conclusion**

These projects have salience well beyond their disciplines—and even beyond scholarly communication—in part because they are imaginative examples of what collective action among humanists scholars and students might look like in the digital age. Cohen spoke of the challenge of *sustainable collective action* in the current climate. Using the web as an equitable starting place, how can we develop practices that enable the full spectrum of professionals in scholarly communication to reshape the system to reflect the values they embrace? By working iteratively and seeking feedback, these projects have been able to respond in close to real time to unanticipated results and external developments. They have faithfully reported on their growth to various constituents. And by participating in this series of meetings, where they confront a range of experts who have no vested interest in their success, they have brought our focused attention to emerging opportunities as well as challenges that we all face as we remake scholarly communication for the digital age. Above all, they illustrate how deeply new modes of working—collaborative, open, and reflective—have penetrated the humanities and unleashed the creativity of scholars, students, librarians, publishers, and the funders and administrators who enable their work.



## SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE

### Meeting on Scholarly Production and Authoring From Projects to Communities of Practice

School of Cinematic Arts  
University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA  
May 21-22, 2013

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