HQP Pathways: Engaging the Canada's Different Disciplinary Models for HQP Training and Funding to Facilitate DRI Uptake in Canada

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Current Issues

We write on behalf of the Digital Humanities Summer Institute (DHSI), the largest Digital Humanities training initiative in the world. Now in its 20th year, with 800+ annual participants, the DHSI represents an engaged community of over 5000 alumni across the Canadian and international digital research space. The DHSI and its sister DH Training Network located at 13 partner sites originally focused on Digital Humanities scholarship and training in particular. In the last decade the network has expanded its offerings, and now addresses the training needs of participants across the Humanities, Social Sciences, Library Sciences, government, publishing, and related sectors. It is from this position as a leader in HQP training in Canada and beyond that we outline current and future needs of the disciplines we represent in Canada's evolving DRI ecosystem.

We write not to speak to the DHSI's specific DRI needs, but rather to offer our insights on the variability of HQP training across the disciplines in Canada. We also wish to highlight the unique opportunity that the creation of NDRIO poses to ensure that Canadian DRI meets the needs of all researchers in Canada, rather than only those who, through the priorities of their funders, have the most well-worn pathways for the support of the HQP who do much of the systems administration, software development, and deployment work in the DRI space in Canada. While some HQP training practices in the Digital Humanities will look familiar to colleagues in the Natural Sciences, Computer Science and related disciplines, we are also in a unique position to comment on HQP training in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Library Sciences, as, through the DHSI network, we train hundreds of HQP in these fields every year.

There are specific historical disciplinary norms and standards in HQP training in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), and Library Sciences (LS). One of the norms that most impacts DRI in these fields is student and postdoctoral fellow research independence. It is unusual in these disciplines for HQPs to work in teams, for example, and/or on their supervisor's research. This norm has many advantages, but it means that most HSS and LS scholars and postdoctoral fellows do not have the years of training that lets them take up the DRI-interfacing roles (including as systems administrators) that might be common in other disciplines. This is not to say that HSS and LS scholars do not need DRI—far from it—but that instead these disciplines will especially welcome the expanded service-oriented approach that NDRIO is planning to take up. It is for this reason that DHSI has had an active partnership in the past with Compute Canada, and sponsorship by Compute Canada for its training initiatives; we would hope for the same relationship with NDRIO, and have been advised to pursue possibilities to this end.

Even if the HQP in our disciplines did traditionally take on the roles outlined above, many of the funding opportunities in our disciplines do not permit it. For example, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada has much lower caps on software development funding allocations than other Tri-Council agencies. While some researchers may turn to CFI for support of this kind instead, many engaged scholars live in provinces that will not match CFI funds for projects outside of STEM, and so many institutional research offices are hesitant to use their CFI envelope for non-STEM initiatives. This produces a circular chicken-and-egg or Catch 22-style dilemma: scholars who are operating with these restrictions may appear not to need DRI, when in fact, structural barriers prevent them from paying for the services they need, creating the misconception that there is no need to raise caps on funding or fund projects from these disciplines because they are not accessing DRI.

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Future DRI State

With NDRIO's recentred focus on researcher-centric, service-oriented, and collaborative maintenance and delivery of DRI in Canada, we would be delighted to see a future state that engages the diversity of disciplinary and computing needs both large and small. For example, for many of the scholars in HSS and LS, a simple managed kubernetes cluster, GitLab instance, or CRM-backed website where they can collaborate and share research results would amplify the impact of their research immeasurably. One might also look to initiatives such as the Canadian Humanities and Social Sciences Commons platform—a collaboration between the Implementing New Knowledge Environments (INKE) Partnership, Compute Canada, CANARIE, the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, Canadian Association of Research Libraries, Canadian Research Knowledge Network, and other key stakeholders—in this way. Many researchers in the disciplines we represent cannot rely on HQP and traditional sources of funding to support this work, for the reasons outlined above. That said, the challenge of launching a virtual machine, choosing an operating system, or applying patches is out of scope for many PIs, particularly at smaller institutions where support for this kind of public dissemination may not be available. Such support might reasonably be offered as a service, taking only a small amount of any NDRIO's staff member's time and offering the advantages of economy and security of scale.

As noted above, we have been very glad of Compute Canada and its regional partners' engagement and partnership with the DHSI and the DH community more broadly over the years. With NDRIO's commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) we would welcome the opportunity to continue this work with the broader DRI community, with an eye to sharing expertise in the realm of EDI in the digital context, including through and via courses like our "Feminist Digital Humanities: Theoretical, Social, and Material Engagements," "Queer Digital Humanities: Intersections, Interrogations, Iterations," "Accessibility & Digital Environments," and related offerings as a natural consequence of action on our statement on ethics and inclusion (https://dhsi.org/statement-of-ethics-inclusion/). As EDI is an increasingly important part of the research landscape, there may be further room to build on shared knowledge about how to bring these critical competencies to the ongoing discussion of equitable HQP training and DRI uptake in Canada.

How to Bridge the Gap

NDRIO's new model of service as infrastructure will bridge the gap between the currently disciplinarily-limited state of DRI in Canada and NDRIO's future goal of meeting the DRI needs of all Canadian researchers. If NDRIO's environmental scan attends to the current regulations of the major funders in Canada, and how those regulations shape current DRI use in Canada, it will be possible to meet the needs of Canadian researchers across the disciplines. The new focus on reaching all researchers—with the inherent equity and diversity considerations that such a goal encourages and the careful attention to disciplinary norms and what various disciplinary funding streams permit—will cement Canada's international research leadership. With such a focus, NDRIO has the potential to broaden and bolster existing networks around HSS and LS research, as well as to establish important new networks. Overall, we believe that NDRIO can multiply future contributions by bringing together communities of academics, experts, stakeholders, and the general public around the research infrastructure they need and the policies that govern it.

Needs Summary

- researcher-centric, service-oriented, and collaborative DRI maintenance and delivery that fits with disciplinary and funding norms of all researchers in Canada (in Humanities, Social Sciences, and Library Sciences this will mean providing systems administration and other support that cannot currently be covered by SSHRC or, in many cases CFI and provincial CFI matching programs).
- Out of the box provision of DRI and related support for common development and scholarly communication tools, such as a kubernetes cluster, GitLab instance, or CRM-backed website, rather than leaving individual research teams with the overhead and inefficiencies of installing and patching these systems themselves.

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