The Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship

Background

In *No Brief Candle: Reconceiving Research Libraries for the 21st Century* (2008) the Council on Library and Information Resources predicts that libraries will work at the "nexus of disciplines and across boundaries…will have the flexibility in expertise and organizational capacity needed to be partners in research" and will be a "laboratory for understanding how a new generation of faculty and students do their work, and for supporting experimentation and innovation in processes that enhance e-research across communities." In light of the shifting needs of researchers, the **Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship** will be a campus-wide resource that fosters library/faculty collaboration in interdisciplinary digital research and scholarship. By providing infrastructure, expertise, and opportunities for collaboration, this research centre will increase the capacity of McMaster researchers to engage in world-class innovative digital scholarship.

Objectives

- To provide a framework of research support for digital scholarship that optimizes library/researcher resource sharing.
- To provision customized and scalable IT infrastructure to support faculty and graduate student research projects in digital humanities/digital scholarship.
- To offer technical support and consulting services for digital scholarship projects, such as programming, data management, and systems administration.
- To promote and develop interdisciplinary digital scholarship networks by providing physical meeting and work spaces.
- To promote and disseminate McMaster University e-research through archival and access initiatives that interface with global e-research partners.

Rationale

For the past four years the McMaster University Library has focused heavily on the development of our "learning commons", spaces aimed at supporting teaching and learning at the undergraduate level. We have made significant investments in renovations, reorganizations of staff, and implementation of new technologies in support of learning. As a result, we have seen dramatic increases in the use of our facilities and services by undergraduates.

The same transformational technologies that have had a dramatic impact on teaching and learning are also altering research. With the advent of digital culture, researchers are exploring technologies, strategies, and relationships in their research. Moreover, the implications of this shift impact the creation and dissemination of this scholarship. New forms of scholarship are emerging; e-books, open access journals, peer-reviewed blogs and wikis, multimedia Websites, datasets and other digital publications are becoming commonplace.

Pioneering institutions such as the University of Virginia (Scholars Lab), Emory (Digital Scholarship Commons) and Cornell (Digital Scholarship and Publishing Services) established centres that promote and support digital scholarship. Canadian institutions and scholars have also been active in defining the field. Ray Siemens at the University of Victoria was among the earliest to define the digital humanities as a distinct enterprise. It is essential that McMaster provide substantive support for digital scholars in order to remain competitive with Canadian peers. The Lewis and Ruth Sherman Foundation's $2.5 million commitment to the Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship provides McMaster with an opportunity to establish itself as a leader in the emerging field of digital scholarship.

Vision

The **Lewis and Ruth Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship** will simultaneously support and promote new collaborations in digital research and scholarship. It will become an internationally recognized model of library/faculty collaboration in digital research and scholarship by bringing together researchers, librarians, archivists, technicians, collections, technologies, and services.

Activities: Two Key Mandates

Facilitation of Research Networks

Event coordination and the provision of physical and virtual tools and spaces to enable collaborative interdisciplinary research among academics and external organizations. The Sherman Centre addresses the challenges of *Forward with Integrity* by moving research in new directions and addressing the stated need for support for interdisciplinary work as well as global outreach. Providing a social workspace for visiting researchers, postdocs, and graduate students is a significant component of network facilitation.

Digital Research Support

Under this mandate, the Sherman Centre provides substantive support for research that incorporates or studies the technologies, products, and implications of digital culture. This inclusive mandate encompasses research using digital methodological approaches as well as taking digital culture as the object of critical investigation. The Sherman Centre will realize this mandate with a unique combination of skills and services. Directly within the Centre, there are dedicated programmers and project managers. Affiliated with the Centre is the Library's Maps/Data/GIS department, with staff data and GIS specialists, who will contribute data analysis, visualization, and management expertise. Closely allied as well is the Digitization Centre, where ongoing projects digitize, describe, and create access to

McMaster's rich research collections. Beyond that, the expertise of the entire organization, ranging from digital publishing to data archiving, can be tapped on demand to support Sherman Centre projects. The Centre will also engage other campus partners such as University Technology Services and Research & High-Performance Computing Support to leverage their expertise at solving large-scale IT challenges.

Primary Clientele

To complement current facilities for undergraduate students, the Centre will provide facilities specifically designed for faculty and graduate students engaged in digital humanities/scholarship research.

Although faculty partnerships have yet to solidify while the Centre is in development, there have been preliminary discussions with the following researchers about potential collaborations:

- David Harris Smith (Communication Studies & Multimedia)
- Michael Egan (History)
- Abigail Payne (Economics)
- Helen Ostovich (English)
- Peter Cockett (School of the Arts)
- Karen Bird (Political Science)
- Alex Sévigny (Communication Studies & Multimedia)
- Nick Griffin (Philosophy)
- Matthew Woolhouse (School of the Arts)
- Jacques Carette (Computing and Software)
- Andrew Mactavish (Communication Studies & Multimedia)

Organizational Structure and Staffing

The Centre will employ a peer-directors model, having an Academic Director and Administrative Director. The Academic Director will report jointly to the Dean of Humanities and the University Librarian; the Administrative Director is a member of the Library's management team and will report to the University Librarian.

The Sherman Centre core staff are:

- Academic Director: Provides academic leadership through the development of a strategic agenda and the promotion of this agenda through networking events, key researcher recruitment, and research funding opportunities.
- Administrative Director: Oversees Centre operations such as staffing, equipment, space allocation, and operating procedures; contributes to strategic agenda development; coordinate Centre operations with other Library functional areas.
- Digital Scholarship Librarian: Manages the technical infrastructure of the Centre; provides project management services to researchers; collaborates in the development of digital research technologies and methods.
- Digital Preservation Librarian: Guides the Library's development of digital collections.

- Staff Programmers: Provide programming support and consultation for research projects.
- Library-supported postdoctoral fellows: Contribute to the intellectual life of the Centre and provide specific disciplinary expertise.

The Administrative Director, Librarian positions, and programmers are members of the library staff, with existing budget lines. The Academic Director will be recruited from an existing faculty line.

Partnerships

Once the Centre is established, we expect to build internal and external partnerships with researchers and organizations, including:

- GRAND NCE (Graphics, Animation and New Media; network of centres of excellence, 26 across Canada)
- Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations
- HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory)
- SHARCNET High Performance Computing
- Research & High Performance Computing Support (RHPCS)
- University Technology Services (UTS)
- Lyons New Media Centre

Governance

The Centre, through the leadership of its Directors, will report on its activities to the Foundation, the Dean of Humanities, and the University Librarian. The Dean of Humanities will in turn report on the Centre's activities to the McMaster Vice President of Research and International Affairs. Additionally the Dean of Humanities or designate will chair the Governing Board of the Centre which will consist of Chairs from departments most impacted by the Centre's activities. The Centre will have an advisory committee including the University Librarian (or designate), Dean of Graduate Studies (or designate), faculty members from each of the six faculties, a staff member from a campus IT partner, and graduate student (or postdoctoral fellow). For specific projects, the Centre and advisory committee may create special advisory committees, which may include faculty members from other departments as well as active scholars or public figures from outside the university. The Academic Director's primary role will be to help coordinate and promote research activities, including seeking further grant funding opportunities. The Administrative Director's primary role is to manage operations and staff. Collaboratively, the two Directors work to define and renew strategic priorities and initiatives and share the conceptual and creative stewardship of the Centre.

In addition, the Centre will conduct a full review of its activities every five years, drawing on members of the McMaster community as well as external consultants (such as directors of similar research centres elsewhere).