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No- and Low-Tech Entry Points to Campus and Community Digital Humanities

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Abstract The digital humanities (DH) can engage students and off-campus communities with scholarly activity in new ways, reaching into extracurricular and public spaces and enabling non-specialists to participate not just as consumers but also creators. Many DH activities, however, are difficult to adapt or scale to allow for broad participation, often due to limitations in technology and training. This article examines the approaches taken by four projects at the University of North Florida to involve diverse populations both on campus and off in active roles requiring little or no technology or specialized technical abilities.

Keywords Public humanities. Digital humanities. Outreach. Pedagogy. Digital editing. Oral history. Community art. Local history.

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1 Introduction

One of the greatest promises of the digital humanities (DH) is the potential to engage students and off-campus communities with scholarly activity in active ways that allow for meaningful personal experiences. Digital scholarship can extend into extracurricular and public spaces in a manner that more traditional academic work often cannot and enables non-specialists to participate not just as consumers, but also as creators. Many types of digital humanities activities, however, are difficult to scale or adapt in a fashion that allows for broad participation. Projects often face limitations in terms of technology, such as when specific devices or software are needed. Participants may also encounter challenges in gaining needed skills in the compressed time frames in which digital project outreach often takes place.

This article examines how four projects based at the University of North Florida (UNF) involve on- and off-campus communities in active roles that require little or no technology or specialized abilities. The first, *Voces y Caras: Latinx Communities of North Florida*, uses oral history to highlight the experiences and contributions of local Latino communities, and the second, the *Embroidering for Peace and Memory*, employs needlework as a vehicle for advocacy and collective expression. The last two, *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection* and *coloniaLab*, are digital editing projects that host workshops involving the transcription and basic TEI-XML markup of documents related to local history. By utilizing activities that present minimal technical and logistical barriers, these projects allow diverse groups to contribute in ways that are impactful and enduring. Through this study, we seek to demonstrate that creating low- and no-tech entry points to digital projects can provide opportunities for participants to see their relationship to academic work in new ways and to discover a sense of belonging within communities built around collaborative processes of knowledge production.

We begin by framing our thoughts in the context of discussions about public and digital humanities, focusing on how the projects under consideration seek not only to connect with communities, but also to construct them. We then examine digital oral history, collective art, and participatory editorial work as approaches that can enable non-specialist populations on and off campus to contribute to digital projects. We conclude with thoughts on the benefits of making participation in digital projects accessible to broad publics.

While the project outreach discussed in this article has taken place within the U.S. academy and in the state of Florida more specifically, the approaches involved are generalizable to other geographical and cultural contexts. Developing accessible entry points to digital projects is a strategy that can function in a broad

variety of situations where access to technology represents an obstacle, participants have little experience with the humanities, or communities have historically been underserved by educational and cultural institutions. Building low-barrier methods to engage participants can be useful in diverse settings in which overcoming divisions and building a sense of solidarity and trust are priorities.

The projects examined here are also relevant beyond the scope of Florida and the U.S. because they exemplify how efforts that are local in focus can speak to larger audiences through the use of digital platforms. By concentrating on the thoughts, experiences, and perseverance of specific groups, such projects can resonate with other communities in distant places worldwide. By largely limiting their scope to local concerns, these projects offer unique opportunities to find points of connection across geographical space and cultural boundaries.

Lastly, we believe that this study can speak to a global audience by promoting alternative voices from the United States. By highlighting the perspectives of immigrants, minorities and young people, the projects examined here break down stereotypes at a time when political leaders in the U.S. are pursuing abrupt and radical change in the nation's role on the public stage. As the U.S. withdraws from decades-old partnerships and alters its relations with people around the world, projects like those highlighted here offer an opportunity to show that people in the U.S. remain committed to notions of equality and justice.

The authors of this article are the two professors who lead the four projects. They are joined as co-authors by four students who have held leadership roles in the outreach activities discussed and whose experiences have helped shape the ideas expressed here.

2 Campus and Community Digital Humanities

Public humanities and digital humanities are areas of practice that have much in common. Both are inherently interdisciplinary, with the former involving non-academic constituencies, who as Carin Berkowitz and Matthew Gibson point out, are "not tied to disciplines" (2022, 71), and the latter being, by definition, a space in which the tools and materials of different types of scholarly inquiry are brought together. Unlike traditional academic fields, public humanities and digital humanities are defined not by their objects of study, but rather by their ethos of praxis. Both are things that one actively 'does' – an idea conveyed in the titles of two recent edited volumes on these topics: *Doing Digital Humanities*, edited by Constance Crompton, Richard J. Lane, and Raymond Siemens (2016); and *Doing Public Humanities*, edited by Susan Smulyan (2021).

In their introduction to the 2023 collection *The Palgrave Handbook of Digital and Public Humanities*, Anne Schwan and Tara Thomson describe public humanities and digital humanities as two "modes of scholarship and practice" (4) that are "increasingly intertwined" (1). As their review of recent literature (3-5) makes clear, over the last decade numerous scholars have analyzed the ways that these scholarly modalities overlap, examining the objectives and challenges that are common to both. From such reflections have emerged two formulations that have become increasingly common: 'public digital humanities' and 'digital public humanities.'

Both terms refer to scholarship that involves technology and publics outside of academia, but each does so from a different perspective or starting point. 'Digital public humanities' suggests a movement of more traditional public humanities practice into digital spaces, while 'public digital humanities' points to digital scholarship that prioritizes connections with non-academic communities. In many contexts, such a distinction may not be useful, particularly as scholars with no background in either of these fields can conduct scholarship that is both public and digital. Such a differentiation, furthermore, is likely to have little relevance for those outside the academy.

In whatever way we understand these terms, Sheila Brennan cautions that neither should be taken to refer to digital scholarship that is public only in the sense of being available online. Instead, according to Brennan, 'digital public humanities' and 'public digital humanities' signal approaches to scholarly work that "place communities, or other public audiences, at their core" (384). These two terms, in other words, do not reference only the public character of the products of digital scholarship, but instead the role that the public plays in the conceptualization and execution of that work.

In an article about reframing the public humanities – not necessarily those which are digital – Berkowitz and Gibson express a similar idea: "Too often when scholars have talked about public versions of disciplines they have meant merely that their wisdom would be understood by or distributed within a public". To Berkowitz and Gibson, the 'public' in 'public humanities' points to something more related to equity and agency: "In its more radical form […], the public humanities ask instead for the academy to give up its ownership of knowledge creation". To these authors, "the best versions of the public humanities – the real 'grassroots' humanities – are created by publics, not merely for them" (2022, 73).

Within the broad area of public and digital scholarly practice, we highlight a few specific approaches to engaging diverse publics through campus-based projects. We have termed this work 'campus and community digital humanities' because it takes place in both those settings. The projects discussed in this article have involved

participation both on campus and beyond, not only by students but also members of the public.

To the second term, 'community,' we also attribute an additional layer of meaning, as all the outreach we describe in this article is not aimed only at engaging with communities but also constructing them. This involves not only conducting scholarship in the public sphere using digital tools but doing so in ways that emphasize the connections and discoveries made by those involved. The activities we describe are informed by ideas about learning as a student-centered, active, and collaborative process and are designed largely to enable collective discovery and the development of relationships and connections.[1]

The potential for such engagement by so many individuals is due, in part, to the way these projects engage collaborators through activities that present minimal barriers related to skills and technology. Those who seek to become more deeply involved with the technological aspects of the projects have opportunities to do so, but little or no experience with specific tools and research methods is required for initial participation. Contributors can connect with the ideas that the projects represent and become part of the communities that have evolved around them in ways that are simple and often serendipitous.

This type of scholarly work is perhaps particularly relevant in a social context in which many feel a sense of disconnection. Since long before the COVID-19 pandemic, a mental health crisis has been unfolding on college campuses (Kadison, DiGeronimo 2004; Singh et al. 2022), and societies around the world are seeing increasing levels of loneliness and social isolation, particularly among young people (Batsleer, Duggan 2021; Morese et al. 2021). While the scholarly approaches we discuss in this article are in no way imagined to serve as a type of formal therapy, the potential benefits to individuals of engaging with projects like those discussed here, and feeling oneself to be part of the community that surrounds them, should not be overlooked.

The reflections in this study pertain to digital projects involving undergraduates at a mid-size regional public university. While the material is not specific to that context, the type of low-barrier community-focused efforts we describe may have particular relevance at similar institutions, where faculty may find they need to do "DH on a shoestring", as Danica Savonick (2022) has put it,[2] and where

1 Sabine Hoidn summarizes many such ideas (2017, 23-59).

2 The four projects here have benefited from generous but modest support from various units at UNF, including the DHI and CIRT, but in general have operated with minimal resources. The faculty involved have been compensated to the extent that they have built this work into their teaching and service responsibilities but have not received direct remuneration beyond modest stipends from the DHI for supervising student interns.

the logistics of student life can complicate the ability of many to feel a sense of belonging and integrate into the life of the university. At UNF, the majority of students live off campus, most work at least part time, and many are non-traditional students who have family and professional commitments in addition to their studies. In this context, the opportunities for connection like those described in this article are perhaps especially valuable.

Figure 1 *Voces y Caras* participants following their public presentation. 2023. Photograph. University of North Florida, Jacksonville (FL). Courtesy of the authors

3 Digital Oral History

Led by Dr. Constanza López Baquero, *Voces y Caras: Latinx Communities of North Florida* is an oral history project in which students at UNF design and record interviews in Spanish with Latino residents of Jacksonville and surrounding areas. The project reflects a growing interest in using oral history to examine the experiences of Latino communities in the United States, a tendency perhaps best illustrated by the founding in 1999 of the Voces Oral History Center at the University of Texas at Austin, an initiative dedicated to "recording, preserving and disseminating the stories of Latinas and Latinos in the U.S. and weaving the many perspectives into our historical narrative at the national, state and local levels".[3] Interest in this type of work is also evident in the scholarship that the journal *US Latina and Latino Oral History Journal*, a companion project of the Voces Oral History Center, has published since its founding in 2017.[4]

3 Voces Oral History Center, "Mission Statement". https://voces.moody.utexas.edu; "Who We Are". https://voces.moody.utexas.edu/who-we-are.

4 "US Latina and Latino Oral History Journal", https://utpress.utexas.edu/journals/us-latina-latino-oral-history-journal.

Two of the most prominent projects focused on oral history and digital storytelling in the context of U.S. Latino populations are the *Bracero History Archive* and *Humanizing Deportation*.[5] A collaboration between Brown University, the University of Texas at El Paso, the Smithsonian Institution, and George Mason University, the *Bracero History Archive* collects the stories of those who participated in the Bracero guest worker program (1942-64). The construction of the digital archive commenced in 2007, based on material that the Institute of Oral History at the University of Texas at El Paso began gathering in 2002 (Leon 2017). *Humanizing Deportation* was founded in 2017 at the University of California, Davis, and involves scholars at several institutions, including Tecnológico de Monterrey, Universidad de Guadalajara, and Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua. The project serves as "a platform for migrants to share personal experiences regarding borders, migration and repatriation" (Irwin 2020).

Like the *Bracero History Archive* and *Humanizing Deportation*, *Voces y Caras* seeks to document stories related to migration and the experiences of Latinos in the U.S. Unlike those projects, however, *Voces y Caras* does not organize its content around a specific historical or political context. Instead, the project focuses on the oral history of migration in a particular geographical region, Northeast Florida. In this sense, it aligns with other projects that explore the experiences of Latino communities in places in the U.S. where they may be unseen or undervalued, such as *Oral Narratives of Latin@s in Ohio*, hosted by the Center for Folklore Studies at The Ohio State University (Foulis 2018, 123); and *New Roots: Voices from Carolina del Norte!*, based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Gill et al. 2019; Vos et al. 2016).[6]

Another distinguishing feature of *Voces y Caras* is the way it functions not only as a public digital humanities project but also a pedagogical experience. In this sense, *Voces y Caras* has aspects in common with the work of other scholars who have used oral history as a method for teaching in courses about Latinos in the U.S. Elena Foulis (2018), for instance, describes a service-learning course at The Ohio State University in which Spanish majors conduct interviews with members of the local Latino community. In another example,

5 *Bracero History Archive*, https://braceroarchive.org; *Humanizing Deportation*, http://humanizandoladeportacion.ucdavis.edu.

6 *New Roots: Voices from Carolina del Norte!*, https://newroots.lib.unc.edu; *Oral Narratives of Latin@s in Ohio*, https://cfs.osu.edu/archives/collections/ONLO.

Matthew Simmons taught an Introduction to Oral History course at the University of Florida focused on farmworkers in that state.[7]

Voces y Caras focuses on using oral history as a tool for working with a specific population of students: heritage speakers of Spanish. The student contributors are participants in SPN3351 Communication and Communities for Heritage Speakers, a course offered each spring that focuses on effective oral communication in Spanish. The students are bilingual and bicultural, and most have grown up in Florida. Their own experiences, and those of their families, provide a foundation for the work they do with *Voces y Caras*, which involves thinking critically about a range of issues related to migration, marginalization, and stereotypes, as well as the power of collective effort, solidarity, and creative production.

The students select their interviewees, who are members of their families, local businesspeople and professionals, civic leaders, and others. The conversations address the interviewees' experiences of immigration, their lives in the United States, and their hopes for the future. Their stories demonstrate the strength and resilience of local Latino communities and highlight the contributions that those populations make to the social, cultural, and economic life of North Florida.

As a digital oral history project, *Voces y Caras* has utilized technology from the beginning. The interviews are recorded and edited using digital tools and are accompanied by digital photographs of the interviewees. The finished product occupies a digital space, with the interviews and photographs published online through a WordPress website hosted by the Center for Instruction and Research Technology (CIRT) and the Digital Humanities Institute (DHI) at UNF.

The project is not exclusively digital, however, but also occupies physical spaces. The preparatory work involved in creating the interviews takes place in a classroom, where the students learn to write questions, develop strategies for conducting successful interviews, and reflect on the cultural and social settings in which Latinos live in North Florida. Although not necessarily visible in the finished products, these processes are fundamental parts of *Voces y Caras*, the meaning of which lies not only in the interviews produced but in the process of self-discovery in which students engage.

7 University of Florida Samuel Proctor Oral History Program [2018], "Our Summer B Intro to Oral History Course Will Focus on FL Farmworker History", `https://oral.history.ufl.edu/2018/04/10/our-summer-b-intro-to-oral-history-course-will-focus-on-fl-farmworker-history` (last access 29/03/2024).

Figure 2 Spanish major Nomaris Oquendo Aponte discusses her interview at the public presentation of *Voces y Caras*. 2023. Photograph. University of North Florida, Jacksonville (FL). Courtesy of the authors

Beyond the classroom interactions that shape and define the project, *Voces y Caras* hosts two annual, in-person events. Each spring, the students present their interviews at a public ceremony attended by their families, the interviewees, and members of the campus community **[figs 1-2]**. This event takes place in Spanish and is a rare occasion in which a physical area on campus is transformed into a space of dignity and pride for Latino communities, from both on and off campus, groups that are not always recognized for the important roles they play in the life of the university and the region.

In a similar way, each fall *Voces y Caras* provides visibility to Hispanic communities through an exhibit for Hispanic Heritage Month. For many years, this took the form of a display in glass showcases in the Thomas G. Carpenter Library. The exhibit featured photos and quotations from the interviews, along with traditional arts and crafts from Hispanic countries. Beginning in the fall of 2023, this event has been a multi-media installation in the art galleries at UNF, featuring images of the interviewees projected onto the walls with short-throw projectors, the voices of interviewees heard through sound domes, and artwork by Latino students and alumni.

Despite the centrality of technology to the project, *Voces y Caras* has always operated with a minimalist approach that suits the challenges involved in gathering the interviewees' stories. In most cases, bringing individuals to campus to record in a controlled studio

environment is not practicable or possible. Such a setting might also prove intimidating for some interviewees or, at a minimum, interfere with the spontaneity that makes many of the interviews so unique and engaging. Portable professional recording gear for student check-out has also not always been available.

To carry out the field recordings, therefore, the students use their own phones, a deliberately simple approach that offers many benefits. Employing their own devices eliminates the difficulties of ensuring students' access to equipment, as well as the need for training in its use. Students are able to focus their efforts on the content of the interviews without getting caught up in technical complexities or worrying about possible mistakes. The informal nature of the recording setup allows both interviewers and interviewees to converse without the intimidation or distraction that can accompany more formal or involved recording situations. By removing technical obstacles, students are better able to focus on the connections they seek to create with the interviewees and capture the candid and intimate exchanges that make the *Voces y Caras* recordings so powerful.

After recording their interviews, students employ tools to edit and caption the videos that likewise present minimal barriers. To edit, they either use programs already available on their devices, including iMovie and Garageband, or download free applications like Audacity. In general, the students face few challenges with these tools, and the editing process has become easier as new free technologies have become available. In order to make the videos accessible and increase their usefulness as a pedagogical tool, students generate and correct captions in Canvas Studio or YouTube, platforms that likewise require minimal training.

4 Community Art

Embroidering for Peace and Memory is a collaborative community art project in which participants embroider messages and designs on pieces of white cloth **[fig. 3]**. Led by López Baquero, the project draws on ideas about needlework as a form of protest, particularly by women, and the notion of craftivism, the intersection of 'crafting' and 'activism' (Greer 2014; Sanders-Bustle 2022). Embroidery as a means of resistance and social communication has a long history in Latin American and around the world and is a subject that has drawn the attention of scholars in recent years, particularly in the context of the #MeToo movement and the COVID-19 pandemic (Boonstra 2022; de la Garza et al. 2022; Segalo 2022). *Embroidering for Peace and Memory* is also informed by ideas about art and social action, as well as collective creation as protest, topics that have also been the

subject of much recent scholarship (Levine 2020; Garrido Castellano 2021; Shipley, Moriuchi 2023).

Figure 3
Mechanical engineering student Jonathan Fitzgerald with his embroidery piece. 2023. Photograph. University of North Florida, Jacksonville (FL). Courtesy of the authors

Since 2012, *Embroidering for Peace and Memory* has been an annual week-long event at UNF that is open to the entire campus community. From 2012 through 2021, the embroidering sessions were held on The Green, an open space that is centrally located on UNF's campus and by which many students, faculty, and staff pass on their way to class or the university's cafeteria, located nearby. In 2022, the event was held in a different space, an area between buildings known as Peace Plaza, also a location with a high volume of foot traffic. In 2023, the sessions were held in the Language and Culture Lab, a space just off The Green operated by the Department of Language, Literatures and Cultures, with the final day at the Ogier Gardens, an organic garden on campus operated by students.

Figure 4 Embroidery pieces displayed on campus. 2023. Photograph. University of North Florida, Jacksonville (FL). Courtesy of the authors

In all these spaces, a central component of the event has been the display of selected pieces completed in previous years. They are hung with clothespins from cords stretched across open expanses **[fig. 4]**. In this sense, the week-long event is both a hands-on workshop and an art exhibition. The installation of the cords and embroidering pieces redefines the locations in which the project takes place and temporarily claims that space as a zone for creativity and free speech that cannot always be found on campus, particularly in recent years, given political changes in Florida and the impact they have had on institutions of higher learning.

In addition to the open sessions, *Embroidering for Peace and Memory* has also engaged students enrolled in specific classes. Faculty from several disciplines have taken their students during instructional time to learn about and participate in the project, and others have invited the project into their classrooms. Most notably, in the fall of 2022, the project was co-sponsored by the Hicks Honors College and over 200 students enrolled in the first-year honors colloquium were invited to participate, following a class presentation by López Baquero, who at that time was a faculty fellow with the Honors College.

Figure 5 Detail of the *Voces y Caras* exhibit designed and installed by Rook Breede in the Thomas G. Carpenter Library. 2023. Photograph. University of North Florida, Jacksonville (FL). Courtesy of the authors

From 2022 to 2024, graphic design major Rook Breede was an intern with the project. In 2022, Breede assisted López Baquero in organizing and running the workshops. Breede introduced participants to the history and goals of the project, helped them to design their pieces, and taught them a basic approach to embroidery. In 2023, Breede took charge of leading the week-long event, overseeing the majority of the embroidery sessions, designing and installing a related exhibit in UNF's Thomas G. Carpenter Library **[fig. 5]**, and representing the project at digital humanities symposia at UNF and the University of Florida (López Baquero and Breede 2022, 2023) **[fig. 6]**.

Breede's work also involved helping to update and maintain the *Embroidering for Peace and Memory Digital Archive*, the website where the project publishes selected items. Breede photographed the embroidery pieces, added the photos to the project's Omeka website, and created Dublin Core metadata for each. In many cases, that metadata includes the participants' reflections on the meanings of their creations and the motivations behind them. Breede also organized the items into a set of thematic collections and added tags that enable users to explore the archive based on other factors. In doing so, she continued the work on the digital archive begun by previous student intern Rebecca Weiner.

Figure 6 Dr. Constanza López Baquero and Rook Breede present on the Embroidering for Peace and Memory Digital Archive at the Seventh-Annual UNF Digital Projects Showcase. 2022. Photograph. University of North Florida, Jacksonville (FL). Courtesy of the authors

While designing the embroidery pieces and carrying out the embroidering itself are low- or no-tech activities, they do, of course, require specialized skill. To make this activity accessible to all participants, therefore, the project provides a minimalist approach that involves sketching out a design on paper, replicating that in pencil on the cloth, and implementing it using a basic stitch that can be learned quickly. In some cases, participants' designs consist only of text, which is relatively simple to develop and carry out. Some contributors engage in more sophisticated work, both in terms of design and execution, but by placing the emphasis on content over presentation, the project has created a route to participation that nearly all students have found accessible.

The project allows large numbers of students to engage in a type of collective creative production and activism that most have never experienced previously. Students embrace the opportunity to express their viewpoints in a way that is visible and lasting. In this sense, the public participation that is central to *Embroidering for Peace and Memory* is not only a way to build the collection but is also an end in itself. The project is an ongoing lesson in art and activism that each year touches the lives of numerous students, many of whom encounter the project entirely by chance.

Figure 7 Student leaders of transcription and editing workshops at the Florida Undergraduate Research Conference: Britney Griffith, Maya Blackin, and Janaya Ferrer. 2024. Photograph. University of North Florida, Jacksonville (FL). Courtesy of the authors

5 Document Transcription and Basic Markup

Directed by Dr. Clayton McCarl, *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection* and *coloniaLab* are digital editing projects based at UNF that have experimented with engaging the public in the online publication of archival materials related to local history. The projects do so through workshops both on and off campus that give the public the opportunity to contribute to the transcription of archival texts, as well as sometimes the basic markup of those materials. The workshops are conducted primarily by student leaders, who also represent the project at conferences and other events **[fig. 7]**.

Involving the public in the creation of document transcriptions is a form of outreach pursued by numerous projects focused on archives and digital editing. This frequently takes the form of "transcribathons", scheduled events at which the public contributes, either in person or online, to the transcription of documents. Prominent examples include the events hosted by *Early Modern*

Manuscripts Online and the *Early Modern Recipes Online Collection*.[8] These projects often use FromThePage, an online platform through which institutions can upload document images and coordinate the transcription process.[9] The Scripto plug-in for Omeka is another popular tool for crowd-sourced transcription.[10]

While the outreach work described here has much in common with these efforts, the term 'transcribathon' does not completely apply to the public-facing activities of *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection* and *coloniaLab*. 'Transcribathon' is typically used to refer to a single or periodic event that is relatively high-profile and focused on engaging large publics at one time. *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection* and *coloniaLab* conduct their efforts on a smaller scale and in an ongoing fashion. More importantly, 'transcribathon' generally conveys the notion of achieving a certain amount of labor.[11] In the case of *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection* and *coloniaLab*, however, neither productivity nor the accomplishment of a predetermined amount of transcription is a goal.

These differences are perhaps a function of the place from which *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection* and *coloniaLab* are articulated. Transcribathons are often organized by libraries and archives, who own the materials and have an interest in producing transcriptions to increase their discoverability and usefulness. They are also coordinated by editorial projects that focus on a defined amount of material. *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection* and *coloniaLab* are both distinct in the sense that neither seeks to complete the transcription of a specific body of texts, but rather are focused on exploring the processes involved in using transcription and digital editing as methods for teaching and community building.

Since 2016, *Editing the Earth M.M. White Collection* has been producing online versions of documents held in Special Collections and University Archives in UNF's Thomas G. Carpenter Library. The materials relate to the life and work of Eartha M.M. White, a businesswoman, philanthropist, and activist who is a major figure in the twentieth-century history of the North Florida region. Her papers are key to understanding American life in Jacksonville and the surrounding area over the nearly century-long span of her life and are a rich source of information about African American religious,

8 "Transcribathon", *Folgerpedia*, Folger Shakespeare Library, https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Transcribathon; "Transcribathons", *Early Modern Recipes Online Collection*, https://emroc.hypotheses.org/transcribathons.

9 FromThePage, https://fromthepage.com/landing.

10 "About", Scripto, https://scripto.org/#about.

11 See Merriam Webster's definition of *-athon*: an "event or activity lasting a long time or involving a great deal of something".

commercial, and social institutions during that time. They likewise represent a major resource for studying the role that women played in the civic life and activism of African American communities.

The project began in the context of a summer digital editing course in 2016. Two years later, the project ran its first small-scale workshop series with the assistance of student intern Susan Williams. In 2020, that workshop format was expanded into a series of weekly open workshops led by intern Lyn Hemmingway, events that took place in the offices of the UNF Digital Humanities Institute. As the student leader of the project, Hemingway continued that workshop series in a virtual format in the spring of 2021.

The format was further developed in 2023 by Hemmingway's successor, Janaya Ferrer, who helped to create a model for offering transcription workshops in the community. The first of those off-campus events took place as part of The Justice Sessions, a speaker series organized by the UNF Department of English. The second was part of the annual conference of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, and the third was part of a birthday celebration for White held at Eartha's Farm and Market, an urban agriculture initiative operated by the Clara White Mission, the social service agency that Eartha M.M. White founded and named for her adoptive mother in the early twentieth century.[12]

In the spring of 2024, student intern Maya Blackin experimented with a different workshop model, running walk-up transcription sessions on a varying schedule held in the Thomas G. Carpenter Library. These events took place in an open study area on a non-quiet floor and offered the advantage of taking *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection* directly to students. Through this format, a broader range of individuals was able to discover the project with very few potential barriers to their initial participation. The students were already in the library, had elected to be in an area where they could interact with others, and in some cases, welcomed the break from their studies that participation in the project provided.

While *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection* is about publishing archival materials online, it has been from the beginning also about pedagogy and direct person-to-person outreach. The project was born out of an interest in doing digital editing with students, and over the years has transformed itself into a laboratory for pursuing a student leadership model for digital editing projects. This model is reflected in the work of Wilson, Hemmingway, Ferrer, and Blackin, who have assumed the primary responsibility for designing, promoting, and

12 "AboutEFAM", Eartha's Farm & Market: A Clara White Mission Initiative, `https://earthasfarmandmarket.org/about-us`; "Clara White Mission", Clara White Mission, `https://clarawhitemission.org/about`.

leading the workshops. They have also selected the documents to be edited and worked with Special Collections to acquire the necessary digital images.

Figure 8 Participants transcribe documents at a birthday celebration for Eartha M.M. White. 2023. Photograph. Eartha's Farm and Market, Jacksonville (FL). Courtesy of the authors

All the workshops involve familiarizing participants to White's life and work, explaining the history of the White Collection at UNF, and guiding participants in the basics of reading the documents. The transcription workshops take a minimalist approach, limiting participants' activity to the reading and typing on a device, or writing by hand on paper, the contents of the documents. The workshops that involve editing introduce participants to TEI-XML and an approach to conducting the basic markup of the documents.

In both cases, the workshops are designed to serve as meaningful experiences for those who will participate only one time, as well as those who may continue to attend subsequent sessions or contribute outside the context of those events. For the on-campus workshops, participants are invited to begin at any point in the semester, and they take on no specific time commitment. Many, however, became regular contributors, attending the workshops week after week. The community workshops are assumed to be the only contact most participants will have with the project, and so are self-contained events, although the project encourages attendees who are interested to stay in touch and continue working on documents, either at on-campus events or remotely.

In the case of both types of workshops, participants generally handle short items that can be completed in a session of 60-90 minutes. These typically are handwritten letters and speech notes

of one or two pages. Participants who elect to work on devices can also choose event programs, brochures, and other typewritten or printed material. Although optical character recognition could be used to digitize some such materials, having participants type from scratch often takes less time and effort than cleaning up OCR scans, and allows for interacting with the document in ways that are often more satisfying. Repeat attendees are given longer documents that require multiple sessions to prepare.

The editing workshops present some demands in terms of technology, as participants need to be able to access an XML editor. The project has traditionally used either oXygen or VS Code installed locally on the computers in the DHI's lab, and some repeat participants have chosen to install VS Code, which is available at no cost, on their own laptops. Since no other specialized software is needed, the technical obstacles to participation, in terms of hardware and software, are relatively minimal.

The need to understand and use TEI-XML represents a more significant potential barrier, but in practice, the student workshop leaders have found that their peers generally do not struggle with this aspect of the project. Most can quickly grasp the purpose, nature and syntax of TEI-XML, and, with few exceptions, have been able to carry out markup using the reduced set of structural and semantic elements employed in the workshops.

Figure 9 Dr. Tru Leverette Hall, Susan Swiatosz, Dr. Clayton McCarl, Dr. David Jamison, and Janaya Ferrer at a transcription workshop led by Ferrer during the conference of the Association for African American Life and History. 2023. Photograph. Jacksonville (FL). Courtesy of the authors

The transcription workshops can be carried out entirely without digital devices. Participants are provided with color printed images of the documents, which can also include QR codes for those who choose to view the images online. Although transcribing handwritten documents by hand may not seem to make sense, workshop leaders have, in fact, found that this indeed is a productive approach. The challenge for participants is generally the reading of the handwriting in the originals. As long as they write that text in a fashion that is not difficult for the workshop leaders to later type into the respective XML documents, real, meaningful work is indeed accomplished. Because these events do not make access to the internet mandatory, they can be held in locations where wi-fi is not available or reliable.

Although they are not required for the transcription workshops, digital devices can be incorporated in a fashion that presents few barriers. The project has been able to provide iPads, borrowed from CIRT and the DHI at UNF, on which participants can create their transcriptions. Workshop leaders have found that even users who have little experience or confidence with digital technology are able to employ the iPads for this purpose. Some participants have also chosen to transcribe on their own phones.

The outreach and public engagement described here are not ancillary activities of *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection*, but instead, a central component of what the project seeks to represent. The community workshops honor the memory and legacy of White's own activism and solidarity and connect participants today with that history. In this way, the project's output has not only been digital versions of archival texts, but also the formative experiences it has created for diverse publics. While the TEI-encoded documents may someday become part of a more formal *Eartha M.M. White Digital Archive*, for now, the name – *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection* – expresses the notion that the project is not just about creating a digital resource, but also about the collaborative processes that can go into the construction of that resource.

Like *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection*, *coloniaLab* is a digital editing project that was born with the dual mission of producing editions and exploring the pedagogical possibilities of that work. Prior to 2019, student contributions mainly consisted of individual interns working on relatively large-scale projects. In 2019, a group of students on a study abroad trip to Colombia assisted in the transcription and basic markup of a legal case related to the history of slavery in the Antioquia region. The following academic year, students in upper-level literature and culture courses contributed to the creation of a digital edition of a census of enslaved persons from the 1840s in Antioquia, work they completed in place of writing a more traditional final paper.

Following the success of the public transcription workshops started by *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection*, McCarl began experimenting with transcription, instead of transcription and markup, as a more basic entry point to the project. He ran one-day transcription workshops in intermediate Spanish courses as a preliminary experiment, and in the fall of 2023, began a weekly open workshop, co-led by intern Britney Griffith, largely following the model used by *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection*. In the spring of 2024, McCarl and Griffith continued that series in a virtual format, making it accessible to a broader range of students.

These *coloniaLab* workshops have focused on documents related to the Spanish colonial history of North Florida. They belong to the collection at the Library of Congress known as the East Florida Papers, a set of administrative records that passed to the United States when Spain relinquished Florida in 1821. The *coloniaLab* workshops have dealt with a subset of materials that comprise correspondence between the governors of Spanish Florida, and their military commanders in outposts along the St. Johns River, on Amelia Island, and at the Matanzas Inlet, south of St. Augustine. They are short documents of usually 1-2 pages that typically deal with specific needs and concerns. Depending on the level of the participant, they can often be transcribed entirely in one sixty-minute session.

Like the workshops run by *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection*, these events are designed to be meaningful even for those who choose to participate only once. Each session, therefore, involves a brief explanation of the documents and their context in the history of North Florida, as well as a high-level introduction to reading and transcribing the items. The project leaders then work with new participants to guide their experience and help them get started. Those who choose to contribute repeatedly work with more autonomy, consulting as needed the documentation and resources on the *coloniaLab* website. As participants' level of fluency in Spanish can vary, having participants work together to read and transcribe the documents is often a productive approach. Following the events, the student leader types any paper transcriptions and marks all the documents in TEI-XML, which McCarl reviews and publishes on the project website.

Prior to 2024, *coloniaLab* worked primarily with documents in Spanish, but the project has begun involving non-Spanish speakers in its work by engaging them in the markup of English translations. In a spring 2024 course on Latin American digital humanities, for instance, all course participants contributed to the Florida series of *coloniaLab* by marking up either Spanish transcriptions of original documents or English translations of others that had previously been published in Spanish. This approach not only allows broader participation in the project's work but also makes the published documents more accessible to a wider public.

6 Impact and Challenges

The impact of these approaches is difficult to measure in quantitative terms, other than by one straightforward measure: numbers of participants. By this standard, we believe all four projects discussed in this article have made significant achievements. Since 2012, over 200 students and an equal number of community members have recorded interviews for *Voces y Caras*.[13] Approximately 700 individuals have contributed to *Embroidering for Peace and Memory* since that same year.[14] Since 2016, 75 students and 25 community members have contributed to *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection,* and 122 students have participated in the work of *coloniaLab*.[15]

While such figures reflect only one way of measuring project impact, we believe they hold particular significance. In each instance, these projects were able to connect students and community members with ongoing collective efforts and provided experiences through which they became active contributors to meaningful, lasting community resources. At a time when many in the United States and around the world question the relevance of the humanities and higher education more broadly, we believe the value of such constructive encounters is best measured in the transformative impact they have on individuals.

Given the emphasis these projects place on broad-based participation, the primary challenge faced by leaders often relates to time. Finalizing the work done by students and community participants involves varying amounts of intervention by project leaders. In cases where these projects take place in the context of courses, a portion of that effort can potentially be built into a faculty member's teaching load. In a similar fashion, some of the labor involved in these outreach efforts can possibly be framed as university or community service. In general, however, undertaking endeavors like those described in this article frequently implies an investment of time that goes beyond the strict expectations of one's terms of employment. The feasibility of such activity may depend greatly on project leaders' professional and personal circumstances, which for many in academia today are characterized by increasing precariousness.

13 "Collaborators" [2025], *Voces y Caras: Latinx Communities of North Florida*, https://vocesycaras.unfdhi.org/collaborators.

14 Because of the nature of this project, participation is inherently difficult to track, but since 2012 over 700 embroidery pieces have been produced, with most participants creating only one.

15 "Credits" [2025], *Editing the Eartha M.M. White Collection*, https://unfdhi.org/earthawhite/credits; "Reconocimientos" [2025], *coloniaLab*, https://colonialab.org/reconocimientos.

The political implications of this work represent another challenge that cannot be overlooked in the current political climate in the United States and elsewhere. To varying degrees, the projects described in this article promote inclusivity, encourage the appreciation of difference, denounce injustice and recover the stories of marginalized groups. Such priorities may be viewed with suspicion and potentially bear negative consequences in certain institutional contexts. The protections that faculty could once take for granted are increasingly uncertain, and the long-term viability of projects like those we describe here therefore may be in question.

7 Conclusions

The first two decades of this century saw active debates around the nature and scope of the digital humanities. The 'hacking' versus 'yacking' distinction and the notion of 'big tent' DH are two examples of ways scholars framed these controversies.[16] Although defining the digital humanities remains an elusive task, scholars seem less concerned today with the urgency of doing so or less convinced that arriving at a definitive answer is possible or desirable. Judging what is and is not digital humanities based on technological or methodological approaches is today likely to be seen as a suspect and exclusionary activity.

Over the past decade, however, a more pressing matter related to inclusion has emerged: the need to diversify the digital humanities not only in terms of approaches but also voices and representation. In recent years, organizations and publications have made deliberate and laudable efforts to expand their reach into new communities and highlight scholarship from beyond Anglophone and Western European contexts. These efforts have not been fruitless, but the question that Tara McPherson posed in the title 2012 chapter "Why Are the Digital Humanities So White?" has certainly not been rendered irrelevant.

Working against such efforts toward inclusivity is the fact that the digital humanities remain, in the United States, at least, largely the domain of exclusive educational institutions. Danica Savonick (2022) points to the way that students are most commonly exposed to the digital humanities at "elite, private and/or research-intensive institutions". Faculty at non-elite institutions have less access to support for DH work in research and teaching, and as a result their students have fewer opportunities to discover digital methods and tools. In this way, a largely closed cycle of privilege within the

16 For a few examples of scholarship related to such efforts at definition, see Fitzpatrick 2012; Nowviskie 2016; Svensson 2012.

digital humanities is maintained, while in the educational spaces where the most diverse populations of students could engage with the digital humanities, the field is almost entirely absent. To truly achieve diversity of perspective, DH must engage with undergraduate students at all types of institutions, as well as the off-campus communities in which those undergraduates live.

Bringing in new voices and perspectives requires not only expanding DH into less privileged environments but also promoting DH as a tool for building relationships and creating communities. DH cannot be something that only happens in English classrooms or in the context of faculty and graduate-level research. It also cannot be only the "intersection between technology and the humanities", or a neutral collection of ideas about collaboration and innovation. To truly diversify, DH must also be about the building of relationships and the creation of communities in which new generations of students and future practitioners can find themselves recognized and their concerns represented. Democratizing DH in this way is, arguably, a step toward truly revolutionizing the humanities and the way we conduct scholarship in the twenty-first century more generally.

The methods discussed in this study illustrate a few ways to construct low-barrier interfaces into broad-based collaboration on digital scholarship. In each case, the emphasis is not on technology but on content and context, and while participants' contributions ultimately become part of online resources, the relationships and connections that are built through these experiences are ends in themselves. By involving diverse publics in activities that are both accessible and meaningful, these approaches enable participation by populations that might not otherwise ever encounter the digital humanities.

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