

ASSOCIATION FOR  
COMPUTERS AND THE HUMANITIES



**To:** White House Office of Science and Technology Policy

**From:** Association for Computers and the Humanities

**Date:** 6 January 2012

**Subject:** ACH commentary on two OSTP RFIs (*Public Access to Digital Data Resulting From Federally Funded Scientific Research* and *Public Access to Peer-Reviewed Scholarly Publications Resulting From Federally Funded Research*)

We write on behalf of members of the Association for Computers and the Humanities (ACH), in response to the OSTP's recent requests for information on public access to data and publications resulting from federally-funded scientific research. ACH urges the White House to ***adopt a more expansive definition of "research" to include the work of humanities scholars***, and to ***work closely with government humanities agencies*** (such as the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Smithsonian, and the Library of Congress) in developing public access policies for federally-funded research and scholarship.

ACH is the primary US-based professional society for the digital humanities, which include computer- and technology-enhanced humanities research, pedagogy, data curation, and knowledge production. The humanities themselves encompass history, literature, ethics, archaeology, linguistics, and other areas of inquiry into the human condition – research disciplines the American Council of Learned Societies define as “those fields of knowledge and learning concerned with human thought, experience, and creativity.” As such, they are intimately connected with work in areas as diverse as cognitive science, computer science, environmental science, and human health. Such connections have only strengthened as humanities disciplines

have moved into the era of “big data,” and as liberal arts scholars contribute in increasing numbers to the digital humanities. Scholars and knowledge workers in this field develop innovative software tools and research methodologies for grappling with digitized content, and partner with information scientists and colleagues in a variety of research disciplines to create common standards for data interchange.

Agencies, offices, and public institutions among our peers in the UK, Canada, and Germany commonly use the term “research” to include work in the humanities and sciences alike. This means that policy and funding reforms are typically made **with consideration to their impact on the whole research output of universities and centers of learning**. In times of plenty, all research disciplines benefit from this shared attention. In hard times, they share burdens more equitably and are prompted to form productive collaborative relationships outside of traditional academic silos and create economies of scale – or at least are able to compete on a more level playing field. Most importantly, policy-makers are driven to seek the interdisciplinary advice that can position them to create larger enabling frameworks – systems that respect the increasing interdisciplinarity of the research enterprise.

American innovator and tech entrepreneur Steve Jobs attributed the commercial and aesthetic success of his endeavors to the blending of what have been called our two cultures: “It’s technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities that yields the results that make our hearts sing.” On a practical level, R&D in library science and the digital humanities has driven and enabled numerous advances in science, technology, and industry. Examples include the development of XML (extensible markup language, a chief engine of the World Wide Web) and Dublin Core Metadata (a key standard for linked open data discovery across disciplinary silos), advances in location-based tools and methods and in usability and user interfaces, and the development of e-Science cyberinfrastructure, or the

creation of – often discipline-agnostic – virtual research environments. **Critical research involves scholars from across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities.** Increasingly, US funders are working together to promote such interdisciplinary research. For example, the Digging into Data Challenge brings together the NEH, the NSF, and the IMLS, along with five international funders, to encourage cutting-edge research with large datasets. Government funders and agencies across all disciplines – sciences, humanities, and medicine – need to work together to harmonize policies on open access to research publications and data.

Digital humanities scholars, developers, and publishers **are among the staunchest allies of open access, data stewardship and digital data preservation, and open source.** We have viewed our work as part of a complex ecosystem encompassing cultural heritage and scientific research since long before initiatives like SPARC (the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) and documents like the *2003 Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities* began to signal the cross-disciplinary nature of these issues so strongly. There are indeed challenges particular to the humanities in making the transition to open access publishing; however, those challenges are not primarily about principles of intellectual property, but rather about the sustainability of various publishing models and revenue streams for scholarly societies. The digital humanities community represented by ACH sees its work as having strong public value, understands that open access brings greater visibility and spurs research advances, and depends on long-term access to research data for scholarship and teaching.

Broad public access to research content produced with tax-payer dollars and the long-term survival of resulting digital data are **as crucially important to the humanities as they are to the sciences.** It is vital to the health of humanities research and to our ability to collaborate effectively with colleagues in the sciences, social sciences, and medicine that **humanities perspectives be formally included**

**in these important conversations.** Policy decisions related to open access are bound up with scholarly funding mechanisms, varying publication models, and unique challenges of long-term preservation, with different impacts in different disciplines. We strongly urge the OSTP, working through the NSTC's Task Force on Public Access to Scholarly Publications and Interagency Working Group on Digital Data, to **strengthen the connection of the humanities and cultural heritage research community to these important initiatives** by including representation from government organizations like the National Endowment for the Humanities' Office of Digital Humanities in deliberations about public access to federally-funded research.



Bethany Nowvickie, Ph.D.  
ACH Vice President and Chair for Outreach & Advocacy

together with ACH officers and Executive Council members:

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