Society for Cinema and Media Studies Statement on Digital Scholarship

Summary
Creative uses of digital technologies enable new ways of knowing, seeing, and sharing, all of which has profoundly affected—and energized—scholarship, teaching, and service across the disciplines. At the same time, the kinds of work—and ways of working—made possible by digital arts and humanities present a challenge to traditional models of assessing academic work. This document reflects the commitment of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies to promote digital scholarship in our field. It provides a statement of principles to guide scholars and institutions in producing, supporting, and assessing digital work; a set of questions and ideas to help scholars articulate the value of digital arts and humanities work to colleagues, evaluators, and administrators; and a set of "best practices" for scholars to consider as they embark on digital projects and subsequently seek to explain the merit of those projects for the purposes of hiring, tenure, promotion, and salary review. We hope that this document will prove valuable not only to those currently undertaking or considering innovative projects in this realm, but also to those seeking to better understand the work of their colleagues.

Part I: Introduction and Goals

Digital media are a thriving new venue for the production and distribution of scholarship in film and media studies, affording dramatic new opportunities for collaboration, exploration, presentation, and conversation, in contrast to the print model that has governed academia for so long. From the creation of digital tools and websites to the publishing of digital books, articles, and video essays, creative uses of digital technologies enable new ways of knowing, seeing, and sharing, all of which has profoundly affected—and energized—scholarship, teaching, and service across the disciplines.

The Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) is defining digital scholarship as **text, sound, and/or image-based analysis/research or original creative work produced and published online or in digital form that contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the field of film and media studies.**

At the same time, the kinds of work—and ways of working—made possible by digital arts and humanities present a challenge to traditional models of assessing academic work. The structures, procedures, and assumptions that govern the evaluation of scholarship, teaching, and service must adapt to the exciting new affordances of digital technologies. Yet this process of adaptation will require significant educational efforts to help colleagues, administrators, tenure and promotion committees, and the public understand the nature and value of digital scholarship.

This document reflects the commitment of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies to promote digital scholarship in our field. It provides a statement of principles to guide scholars and institutions in producing, supporting, and assessing digital work; a set of questions and ideas to help scholars articulate the value of digital arts and humanities work to colleagues, evaluators, and administrators; and a set of "best practices" for scholars to consider as they embark on digital projects and subsequently seek to explain the merit of those projects for the purposes of hiring, tenure, promotion, and salary review.

Because of the diversity of the field and the infinite possibilities open to film and media scholars in the digital realm, there can be no fixed criteria, nor hard-and-fast rules, for the evaluation of digital research. Instead, this document offers philosophies and guidelines to help scholars define and undertake digital projects, then assist others in understanding and assessing those projects and their value. We hope that it will prove valuable not only to those currently undertaking or considering innovative projects in this realm, but also to those seeking to better understand the work of their colleagues.

Part II: Statement of Principles

Digital scholarship has transformed, and will continue to expand, the possibilities of academic work. SCMS enthusiastically embraces the continued development of and experimentation with digital scholarship and we adopt the following principles:

1. Digital media enable new modes of production and dissemination of academic research.

Scholars should be encouraged to utilize digital tools in their academic work--such as video essays, interactive/multimedia presentations, database-intensive scholarship, the affordances of social media for public conversation and feedback, and more--and to embrace the possibilities for new modes of inquiry, engagement, and collaboration that digital media facilitate. Digital media not only enable the faster and wider circulation of academic monographs, but they importantly have opened up new avenues for scholars to pose and answer questions, work collaboratively with other researchers, engage in robust dialogue across multiple publics, adopt innovative pedagogical practices, and develop creative forms for the construction and distribution of research.

2. Digital scholarship constitutes a significant contribution to academic research.

While digital scholarship takes many forms and serves myriad functions, and while works of digital scholarship should be assessed—like all academic work—on their particular merits, digital scholarship should be understood as a constitutive, rather than secondary or peripheral, component of academics' research profiles. The digital project is not a luxury item to be "gotten around to" after tenure, but a valuable contribution that can often be a superior means for advancing academic arguments, presenting findings, and furthering scholarly conversations. Accordingly, it should be recognized as such in hiring and promotion deliberations.

3. Digital scholarship should be assessed according to appropriate criteria.

Digital scholarship frequently troubles extant ideas about authorship, form, rigor, and impact in academic research. As elaborated upon below, digital scholarship should be evaluated based on appropriate standards that take into consideration the aims, scope, and impact of digital scholarship as well as the forms of labor required in its creation.

4. Digital scholarship can enhance connections among research, teaching, and service.

One of the strengths of digital scholarship is its capacity to provide valuable resources for instructors, researchers, and the wider public. However, that digital research projects contribute to classroom practice or subsequent research projects should not diminish their contribution as a form of research. Digital projects not only can enable greater resource-building and resource-sharing, but can reframe how scholars and students examine and explore particular issues or questions. Indeed, because of the role that community-building plays in digital work, and because digital scholarship often prioritizes accessibility or has an expressly pedagogical intent, digital projects reveal the degree to which the dividing lines between research, teaching, and service were always illusory.

5. Faculty and administrators should collaborate to make transparent how digital scholarship will be valued and evaluated.

Given the importance of digital scholarship to current and future academic research projects, faculty should, when appropriate, be encouraged to utilize digital tools in their scholarship. Individual faculty members, academic departments, and administrators should work together to clarify how digital scholarship will be evaluated and assessed for hiring and promotion purposes

and these metrics should be transparent and available.

Part III: Explaining and Evaluating Digital Scholarship

From the creation of digital tools and websites to the publishing of digital books, articles, and video essays, digital media scholarship appears in a broad range of formats and contexts. Defining digital scholarship can be complex and challenging, particularly as it relates to evaluation standards and "metrics" used by tenure and promotion committees. Moreover, we tend to think of new work through the frameworks established by traditional scholarship, and in many ways, the framework for print-based work may be inadequate to account for the distinctive and varied contributions of digital scholarship. To offer just one example, digital scholarship often tends to be collaborative and interdisciplinary, requiring not only a deeper understanding of how various authors have shaped the project but also an affirmation of the unique merit of work that transcends disciplinary boundaries and bridges scholarly communities. This is one of the many challenges faced by scholars wishing to translate their digital contributions to evaluating agencies steeped in histories of print traditions.

With the tremendous growth of online and digital-based scholarship in our field, it has become apparent that there is a need for an organizational statement that might assist institutions with evaluating these materials. Indeed, digital materials were formerly thought of as "non-traditional" and have often been considered as something "less than" or "supplementary to" print-based work. However, thanks to the timeliness of online distribution, the ability to reach global audiences, and the artistic, pedagogical, and intellectual possibilities opened up by digital platforms for media scholarship, this modality has helped to push boundaries in our discipline and has proliferated well beyond the margins into the mainstream of our field's research and publications. Many in our field are in fact responsible for creating some of the most innovative spaces in which to create and share such work.

SCMS wishes to assist hiring, promotion, and other evaluative bodies in assessing digital scholarship, while also supporting its members who wish to innovate and explore this terrain for rigorous and creative production, research, cultivation, and analysis. It is imperative to point out that many digital contributions are carefully peer-reviewed, and often provide a process to publication that is similar to that of their print counterparts. However, the absence of such a process should not diminish the evaluation of the work: often the strength and value of digital scholarship is its ability to overcome the constraints of traditional peer review, and new forms of post-publication review are also emerging. It is also important to recognize that not all digital scholarship is simply the equivalent of taking a print piece and putting it online; in fact, most of it requires multi-dimensional skill sets and sensibilities (artistic, technological, technical/programming, curatorial) in order to enliven the possibilities of the digital medium. The complex demands of such work should be a consideration when assessing its impact, originality, value, and contribution to the field.

Digital scholarship makes academic work more easily accessible to a wider and more diverse audience than has ever been possible with print-based publishing. Toward that end, digital projects can advance a cultural commitment to the principle of open access and can therefore extend the influence of scholarly work throughout such communities as journalists, government

agencies, and workers from a variety of industries. This enhanced circulation of our work reinforces the valuable contributions scholars may make to a readership well beyond the university. It also enables new forms of multi-way dialog and collaboration, making scholarship significantly more interactive to the benefit of the scholar as well as the scholarly community.

Prominent examples of innovations in digital scholarship within media studies

MediaCommons is a community network for scholars, students, and practitioners in media studies, promoting new forms of publishing within the field and supporting a wide range of intellectual writing, creative work, and colleague discussions, through user blogs, profiles, and portfolios of scholarly work. Its longest running project, *In Media Res* (IMR), experiments with collaborative multi-modal forms of online scholarship, in order to promote dialogue amongst scholars and the public about contemporary approaches to studying media.

The Humanities, Arts, Science and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC) is an alliance of individuals and institutions committed to collaborative thinking across traditional disciplines, the boundaries of academe and community, the "two cultures" of humanism and technology, the divide of thinking versus making, and social strata and national borders. The HASTAC website features a blog where member scholars develop collaborative projects, discuss pedagogy, and debate issues relevant for the community. HASTAC also hosts an annual conference.

The Carsey-Wolf Center's Media Industries Project (MIP), based at UC Santa Barbara, examines the profound changes affecting media industries worldwide. In its research and programming initiatives, MIP fosters collaboration between the industry and academy, encouraging innovative thinking and critical insights about the future prospects of modern media. Its thriving website publishes timely updates, interviews, and independent analyses of industry practices, policies, and trends, including *MIP Research*, an online, peer-reviewed publication that contextualizes key industry concerns in more critical frameworks.

Flow is an online journal of television and media studies published at the University of Texas at Austin. *Flow* provides a critical forum where scholars, teachers, students, and the general public can read about and discuss the changing landscape of contemporary media at the speed that media moves. *Flow* also sponsors a bi-annual conference in Austin that extends the model of collaborative and dialogic digital scholarship back into the traditional academic conference.

A number of universities have established digital scholarship labs, including the University of Richmond, Rice, Brown, Emory, Miami, Ohio State, and Case Western Universities, the Universities of Utah, Oregon, Kansas, and California at Irvine, among others. Additionally, there are now a variety of web-based, peer-reviewed media studies-related journals with prominent editorial boards, including *Transformative Works and Cultures*, *The International Journal of Communication*, and *Media Industries*. It is clear that there is tremendous momentum behind digital-based scholarship and it is imperative to support those who are working in and creating inventive models for research that have little precedent but tremendous possibilities for the future of our discipline.

Another prominent online platform for digital scholarship in media studies closed after six years of operation: *Antenna*, published by the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Antenna was a collectively authored blog committed to timely and careful analysis of media and culture that bridged the gap between scholarly journals and single-author media scholar blogs. While consistent with the impermanent nature of any scholarly venue, the end of Antenna also highlights the challenges of sustaining valuable digital scholarship projects.

Part IV: Best Practices and Suggestions for Scholars

The following set of "best practices" is provided for scholars to consider as they embark on digital projects and subsequently seek to explain the merit of those projects for the purposes of hiring, tenure, promotion, and salary review.

1. You and your institutional resources—develop an existing resource inventory.

All scholars need resources, and available resources will vary greatly from situation to situation, and institution to institution. Most scholars, sooner or later, will also need to make specific requests for institutionally provided and supported resources. Begin with an inventory of what is already available to you, or might be available to you, at your institution. Get your department chair involved (as well as your department mentor, if you have one) and keep those people involved. Do the work of writing down what is identified and updating the list of extant resources rather than keeping it only verbal or expecting others to remember the list.
As the list begins to take shape, ask your department chair if there are any ways to bring in and add to the list other extant institutional resources beyond your department. These might be in more obvious places, such as libraries and IT work centers, or in less obvious places such as other departments or schools. After you and the department chair have worked on the list and have made demonstrable progress, then consider asking if you and the department chair can discuss the extant inventory with your Dean (or Dean's office). Tell the Dean you want to start by FIRST identifying what resources ALREADY EXIST that you might be able to mobilize, and then at a later point after that list is developed and you start to mobilize those extant resources, you and the department chair will likely return for another visit with the Dean, update your progress, and begin the conversation of identifying needed new, non-existent institutional resources that would be of value.

2. Seek specific resources and support beyond what already exists at your institution.

This is done in tandem with an inventory of extant resources, and as a response to the results of the inventory. You may or may not receive an annual discretionary research fund, and/or start-up funding, depending on the institution. If your institution provides start-up and/or annual research funds, avoiding duplication of extant resources will maximize your funds. Consider a multi-year plan for building up resources. Consider (if you have discretionary or start-up funds) exploring any possibilities of cost-sharing. Discuss with your department chair—and then consider visiting the Dean along with your department chair—checking on near-term future resources the university has planned to roll out or otherwise add to the overall University inventory. Along with your department chair, ask the Dean if your work might be of interest to donors and the development office.

3. Get to know the world of fellowships and sponsored research, and what external funds might be reasonable for you to pursue.

Most universities provide extensive IT-based and online search systems that help faculty begin to identify what, if any, external funding agencies are appropriate candidates for you to pursue funding. Gain some familiarity with these services and search engines. If there are grants and fellowship people available for consultation at your institution, have an introductory meeting so they get to know you and your work, and you get to know what advice and assistance they might be able to offer.

4. Know your IT and digital platform support services and people.

It is one thing to build a resource inventory, and another thing to maintain resources in working order. It is particularly important to include your IT people in acquiring new resources, as they will be crucial in making the resources run efficiently. Many institutions have appointed staff with a specialized brief to support digital scholarship. Colleagues in IT, the library, or dedicated positions can become your skilled collaborators, partners who can bring key knowledge and labor to your project. There may also be resources available beyond the institution; for example, the Australian Research Council runs a competitive scheme for infrastructure that has helped humanities scholars fund database development and other projects.

5. Take a tip from the scientists: keep a log book of activities and contributions by you and by others with whom you collaborate.

The log book, lab book, or daily diary of the working scientist may seem a bit of a cliché from the past, but scientists (and any good professional researchers) running labs do in fact keep ongoing and accurate accounts of who does what as a way of tracking results, demonstrating who does or does not share in findings, tracking the disbursals of sponsored research funds, effort reporting, and many other reasons. Find ways to effectively document on a continuous basis who does what, particularly in collaborative settings, and make sure that you, your department, and your department chair (and probably also your Dean) all agree that the ways in which you are documenting productivity in your "lab book" make sense to everyone and will be useful in understanding your particular contributions to collaborative work. As part of this, remember that your library and IT collaborators need to be credited in ways that support their own development within the often quite different personnel regimes in which they work.

6. Figure out what will "count" in salary review and tenure-promotion, "how" it will count, and most importantly, how much any activity will "weigh."

Lots of things count—but the bigger questions are *how* it will count (especially whether a given project will be regarded as scholarship or service) and what *weight* it will be given, perhaps better put as impact or significance. Of these, significance or weight is most important.
First, figure out what will be "counted" at all. Most institutions have a standard department or school form or guidelines for annual merit review that reflect that institution's norms and priorities for evaluating scholarly work. Second, ask your department chair "how" a given activity will be counted if it is not obvious which category on an annual merit review form (or other assessment tool) best suits a given activity. ONCE there is consensus and clarity on what counts and how to count it, THEN you can begin the ongoing and more complex—and much more important—dialogue on weight-impact-significance. If your digital scholarship will not be considered for tenure and promotion, if it will not be counted in your preferred category, or if it will be given little weight in your overall assessment, you need to know that before embarking on the project.

The last point to make here is that what "counts" at any given institution can change. While you need to be realistic and pragmatic about your institution's norms and procedures, pushing your institution forward might be about finding ways of articulating the value of your project that can help your evaluating colleagues understand the weight that should be accorded to a project,

rather than assuming there is some pre-existing, unchanging scale on which things can be weighed.

7. Weight-impact-significance and merit pay-promotion-tenure may be productive measures for some projects but as there are no commonly agreed upon metrics, scholars will want to negotiate on a project-specific basis.

Some scholars have found over the years that external measures, including empirical measures, may strengthen the value of individual subjective judgments in decision-making. Decision-makers like data and see it as evidence of credibility, even in cases where the measures seem at odds with their individual subjective judgment. Appropriate empirical measures for digital scholarship are beginning to gestate but are not yet widely recognized and reliable metrics have yet to be standardized. For those interested to incorporate these measures, have the dialogues with your department chair and Dean on appropriate external and empirical measures to search for in the data.

8. Share your knowledge and build the community.

Would your institution be willing to host—at some point in the first five or so years of your career—a small conference or symposium on the topic of measurement, evaluation, and mentorship of digital scholars? Would you at some point author or co-author an article on your experiences for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or similar venue? While these types of activities are most likely viewed as service to the profession (and therefore "count" but do not likely have the same "weight" as other activities) they are important and help build better standards, practices, and a stronger community of digital scholars.

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