

Overcoming the Curse of Knowledge with Cross-disciplinary Collaboration:

Creating a Digital Humanities Community at
Southern Methodist University

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Outline

- Broad Context:
 - Digital Humanities (DH)
 - User Experience (UX)
- Our Project



We will be discussing our efforts to build a digital humanities community at SMU from scratch, focusing on some of the challenges we encountered and lessons we learned.

Digital Humanities

Rafia Mirza, Humanities Librarian: rmirza@smu.edu presented this section

8. We call for the integration of digital culture in the definition of the general culture of the twenty-first century

[illegible]

There can also be an impulse to want to define DH broadly/globally and look to established model (looking to successful projects, established initiatives, funding organizations like the NEH, etc.) but it is also important to take into account local communities, goals, and circumstances.

Tensions within DH

- “Considering digital humanities qua intellectual community, Klein (2015) sees an ‘identity crisis’ brewing: though ‘A “Big Tent” provides strength in numbers,’ ‘if everyone is a digital humanist then nobody is’ (pp. 34-35).” (Poole)
- “But the Eternal September of the digital humanities most threatens to exhaust us all when our newer colleagues, who are most visible online, make two assumptions: they think that all “Most of us are newer and more insular than we realize.” (Nowviskie)

One of the biggest challenges can be the tensions between what DH requires and what our infrastructures supports/maintains and rewards. We want to work towards: Interdisciplinary environment, cooperative/collaborative learning and community of practice vs. hierarchies and silos (but can't really avoid in large & not so large traditional institutions). We also have this tension in the concept of Service vs Collaboration. In the context of DH, and the language of power, ‘service’ can reinforce hierarchies and creates insiders and outsiders. It (Service) can say you as someone lower on the hierarchy will do this for me, it can also if some has social capital, service say to community as the expert I will do this for (to) you. But if you overcorrect and over away from the concept of service, in if will do this for someone, in trying to avoid exhaustion (eternal September & vocational awe) you can move into insularity and gatekeeping & boundary maintenance.

Communities require: require communication between peers, in ways that are not traditional in: the academy, in silos, in hierarchical power structures. (Tangent: documentation or PMP in service of this collaborative process can codify and reify these new infrastructures that reinforce collaborative

practices)

We saw this tension between “experts” and novices”, and we used UX to bring together to create DH project that was collaborative and shaped by all of our points of view and (we think) made better by all of our participation.

DH & libraries (& library staff)

- “Digital humanities involves research and teaching and building things and participating in communities both online and off. In libraries, digital humanities should involve those same things.” (Munoz)

- Vocational awe and librarianship: the lies we tell ourselves (Etterh)
- How to Scuttle a Scholarly-Communication Initiative (Salo)
- Hail the maintainers (Russel & Vinzell)
- What are some challenges to doing DH in the library? (Posner)

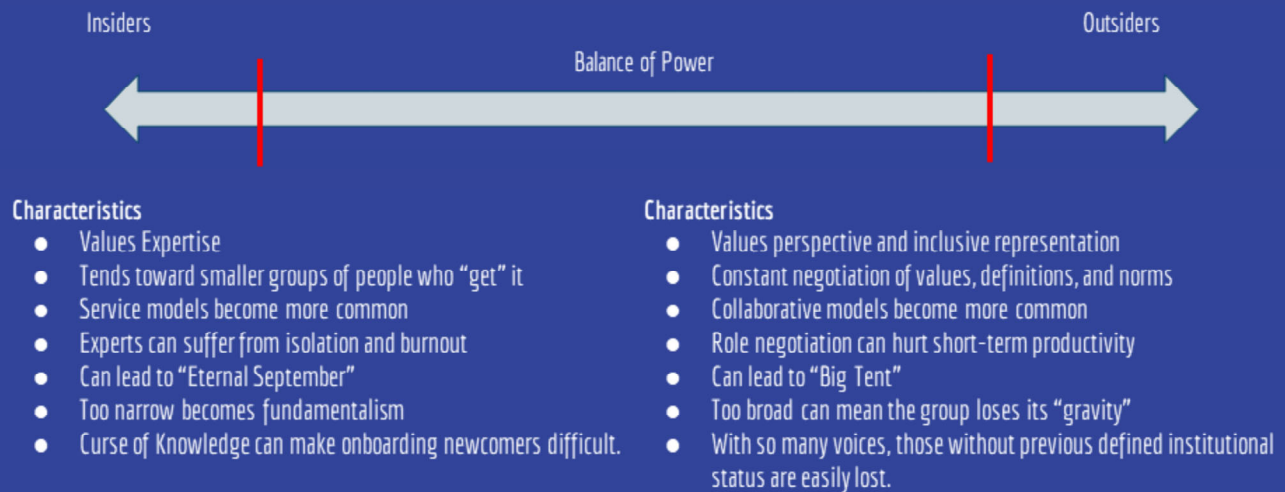
Often DH initiatives, centers are in or have affiliations with libraries, why are library staff doing this? Librarians already possess translatable digital skills, information organizing skills, but another useful skill is the reference interview. In a reference interview or consultations (ideally) you don't give the person what they ask for, you have a conversation to figure out if the way they framed the question will help them find what they are looking for, and help them with the best strategy to get what they need. Ideally at reference desk you do collaborative consultations, not research assistance. Help the patron become empowered and allow for growth.

(Also re: campus silos) Libraries & Librarians are good partners for DH, because not necessarily either personally (or structurally) invested in a particular discipline, but invested in the community as a whole, collecting, gathering, structuring, and preserving and making accessible information. Challenges for libraries: Library staff also have service orientation, which is good, but as the field keeps out-pacing infrastructure, there can be the danger of creating another (understaffed) service point, burnout. (Danger of DH, SC (or any new service) being single person or even just a few, can't

scale that up, it needs to be a community of practice.

Ideal: Libraries as Incubators for collaborations, partners → moving beyond service centers.

Finding the right balance between insiders and outsiders



One of the biggest challenges is the tension between what DH requires and what our infrastructures supports/maintains and rewards.

There is a balance between being open and being insular. If too open, how to avoid exhaustion (eternal sept & vocational awe), but if too closed, how to avoid insularity and gatekeeping/boundary maintenance.

In this project, we wanted to design for community using UX. So how to balance the (Big Tent) Insider/ outsider and service /collaboration Balancing requires communication between peers, in ways that are not traditional in the academy, this kind of collaboration is a culture shift for many disciplines.

Expert (service) -- Community of practice (collaborations).

Balance of power:

Characteristics: Insiders

- Values Expertise
- Tends toward smaller groups of people who “get” it
- Service models become more common

- Experts can suffer from isolation and burnout
- Can lead to “Eternal September”
- Too narrow becomes fundamentalism
- Curse of Knowledge can make onboarding newcomers difficult.

Characteristics: Outsiders

- Values perspective and inclusive representation
- Constant negotiation of values, definitions, and norms
- Collaborative models become more common
- Role negotiation can hurt short-term productivity
- Can lead to “Big Tent”
- Too broad can mean the group loses its “gravity”
- With so many voices, those without previous defined institutional status are easily lost.

We don’t think our knowledge/experience/expertise gives us exclusive power over the direction of DH at our institution. We try not to forget that knowledge and experience have their drawbacks. We are not trying to initiate compliance to our interface. Instead, we are looking to foster organic collaboration that can change the culture of DH and how we approach it.

Like the reference desk, the model you use to guide your actions in your job changes the way circle is drawn. Do you value expertise or community? Who is at the table? Who determines this? What is the design choice? How explicit are you being about the infrastructure and design? Good intentions are not enough when it is one person, need to make design choices, documented choices about why/how/what you are doing.

Site as infrastructure for community, not for service. Inclusivity wagers that you no longer have control over what happens next Platforms instead of solutions work where the goal is to empower users/the community to solve their own problems. (Community of practice). Thinking differently about methodology - collaborative vs individual scholar ***Can you help me, can you work with me rather than can you do this for me (service)? / I will do this for you (colonial).*** Be self-reflexive about what we are doing and why, how does the process we go through affect (#critlib, decolonial DH, post-custodial archives, critical

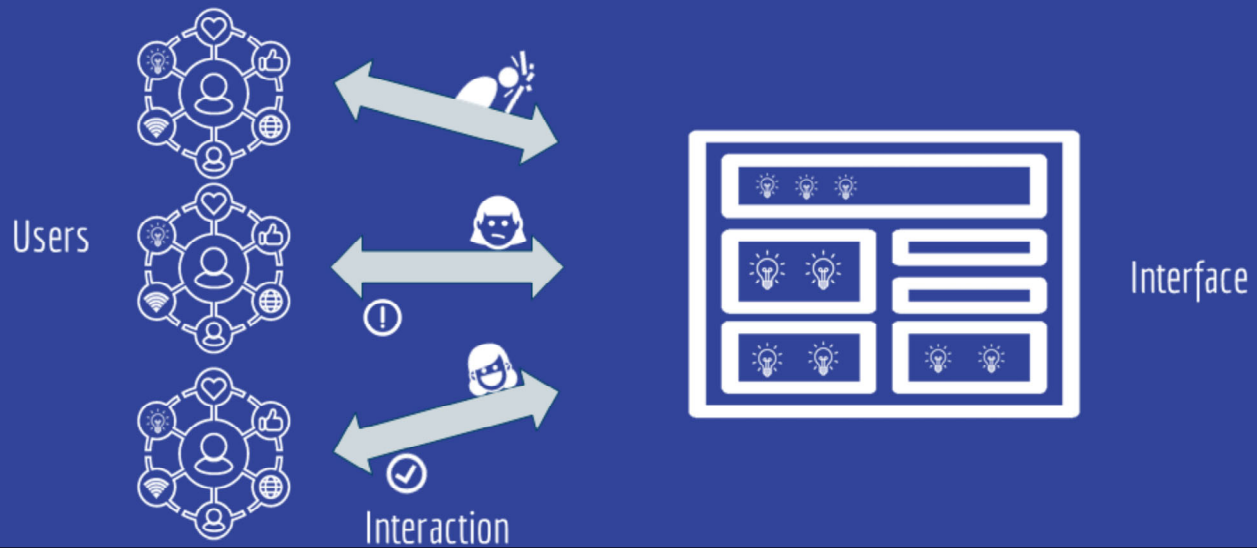
university studies, approaching data with intersectional feminist methodologies)

UX in Digital Humanities

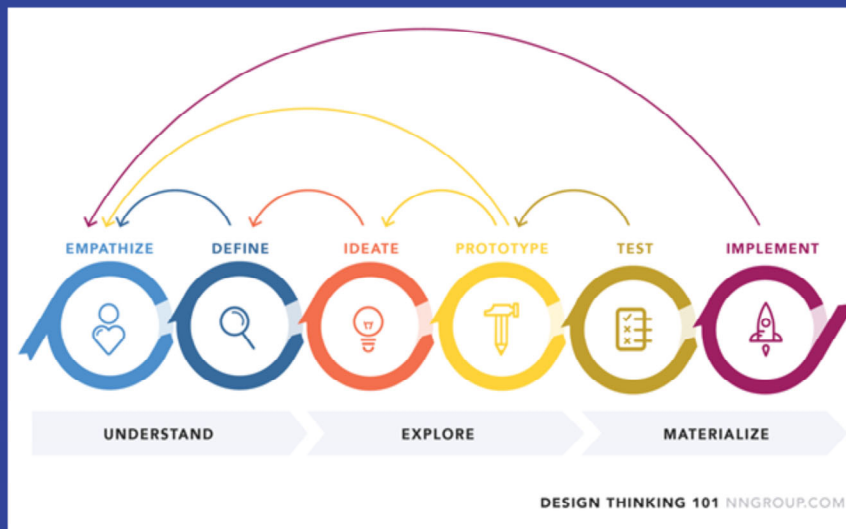
Jonathan McMichael, User Experience Librarian: jmcmichael@smu.edu
presented this section

How do you design for community?

Curse of Knowledge as a UX problem



Design Thinking/Human-Centered Design



Representation is a Design Choice



Annette Carroll
Founder, President and CEO of Creative
Reaction Lab

“While I’m a fan of it [design thinking], I think it’s flawed, because it’s a system that continues to have outsiders. You cannot say that you are effectively addressing these issues if you are not including the people affected by them into your efforts, and giving them access to power.”

Annette Created [Equity Centered Community Design](#). It is not expertise based community design.

Our project

Margaret Terrill: margaret.c.terrell@gmail.com presented this section

While we were physically building a User Interface, we did not stop there
Instead, we focused on User Experience by focusing intently on user needs
and behaviors

Problem: Everyone is new - no institutional knowledge

Project Goals

- Overcome the documented difficulty for newcomers to Digital Humanities (See: Bethany Nowviskie's "Eternal September of the Digital Humanities")
- Create a web presence in SMU's Library resources that allows for easy onboarding
- Empower users to see what is possible in DH as a whole and for their own projects

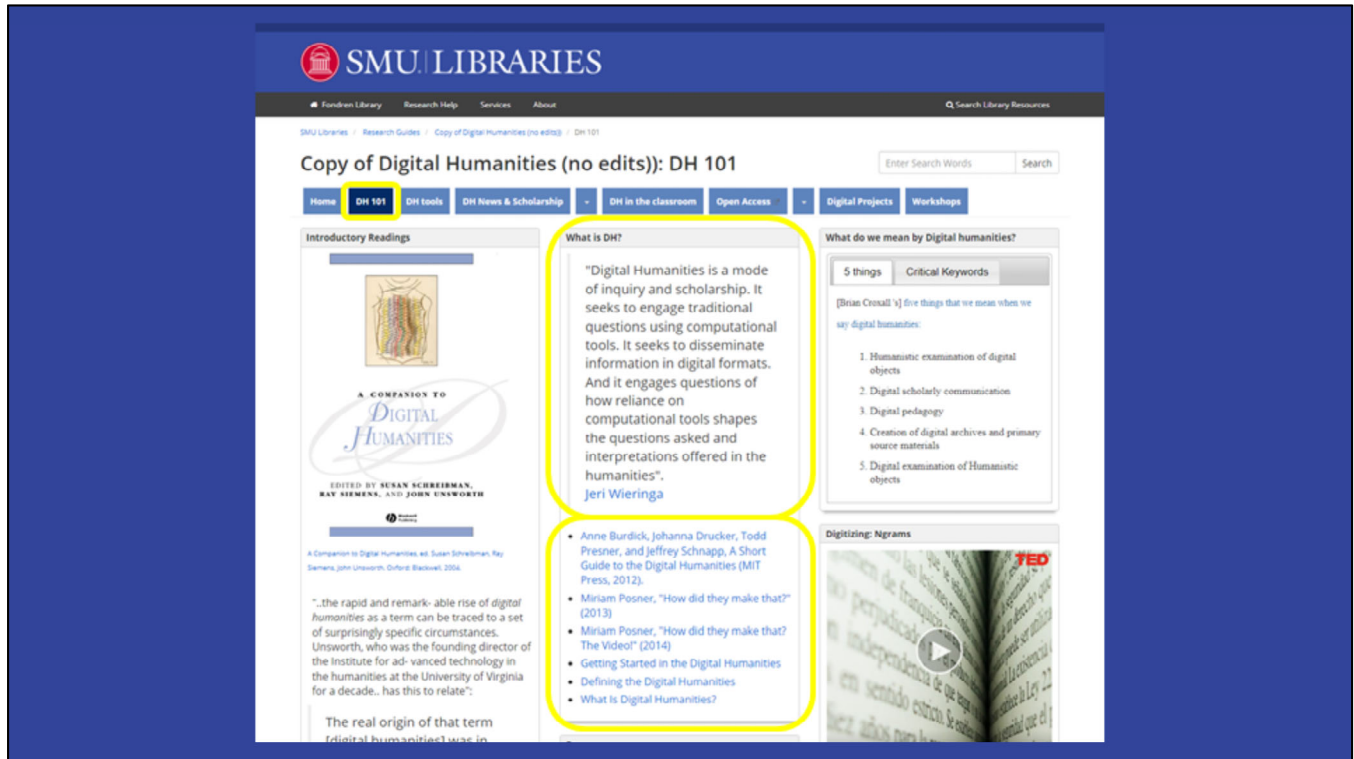
Where it began



Here is the page we were starting with

You will notice, there is a lot of great content, but it is very overwhelming, particularly to new users

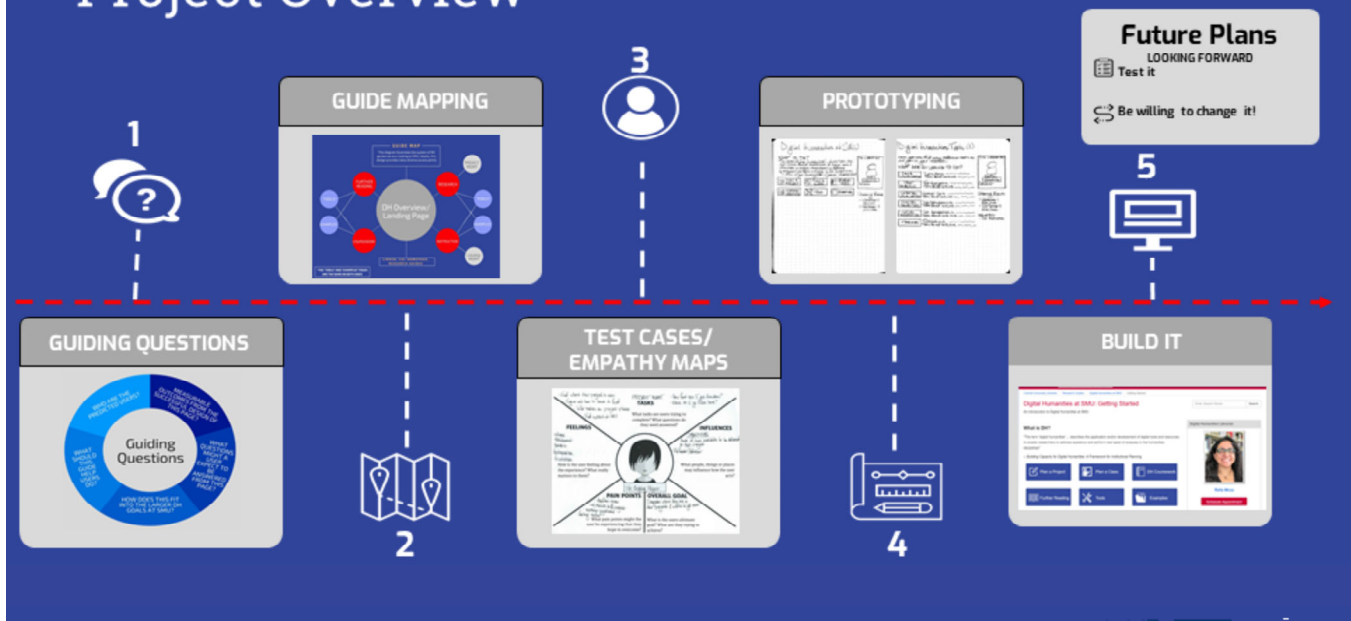
1. Tabs -- I have to have some understanding of DH to know where I should be starting
2. Foreword -- this is a definition of DH, which is great, but this version ends up as a block of text that is filled with jargon that assumes a level of expertise



Here is the page we were starting with
 You will notice, there is a lot of great content, but it is very overwhelming, particularly to new users

1. With a title like 101, I assume as a user that this is what I need to get started,
2. Again, like the home page, it is good to have a "What is DH" section with a definition, but this definition isn't very new-user-friendly
3. These are some

Project Overview



What are we trying to accomplish

Why did we choose this way to do it

What do you need to know about the image below

Create web presence that allows for easy onboarding

empowering users to see what is possible in their own projects

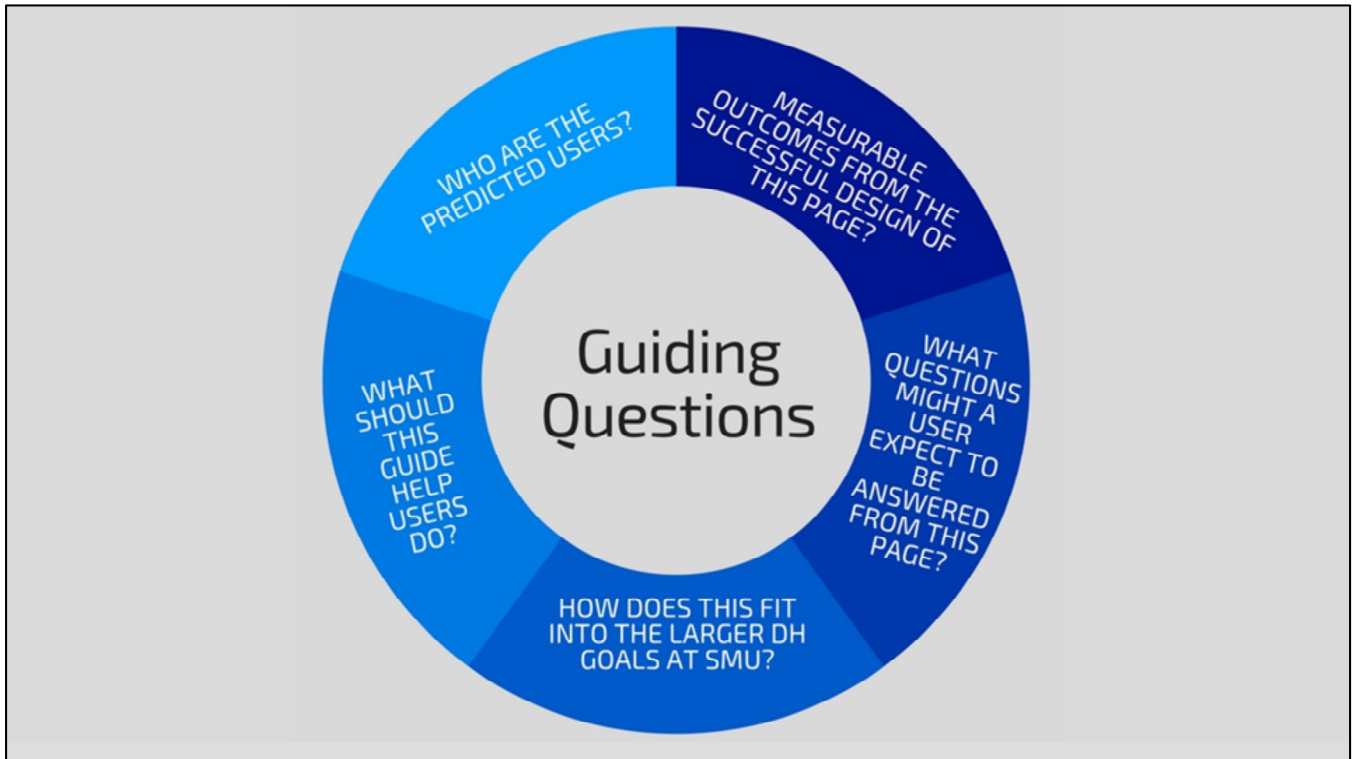
Map by Dinosoft Labs from the Noun Project

User by Milinda Courey from the Noun Project

Question by Gregor Cresnar from the Noun Project

Prototype by Creative Stall from the Noun Project

Mockup by AlfredoCreates.com/icons & Flaticondesign.com from the Noun Project



We began, not with answers, but with questions

To gain an understanding of the needs of DH scholars, we collaborated with a DH expert to formulate five essential questions. These questions together helped us to shape each guide page and to keep it aligned with user needs.

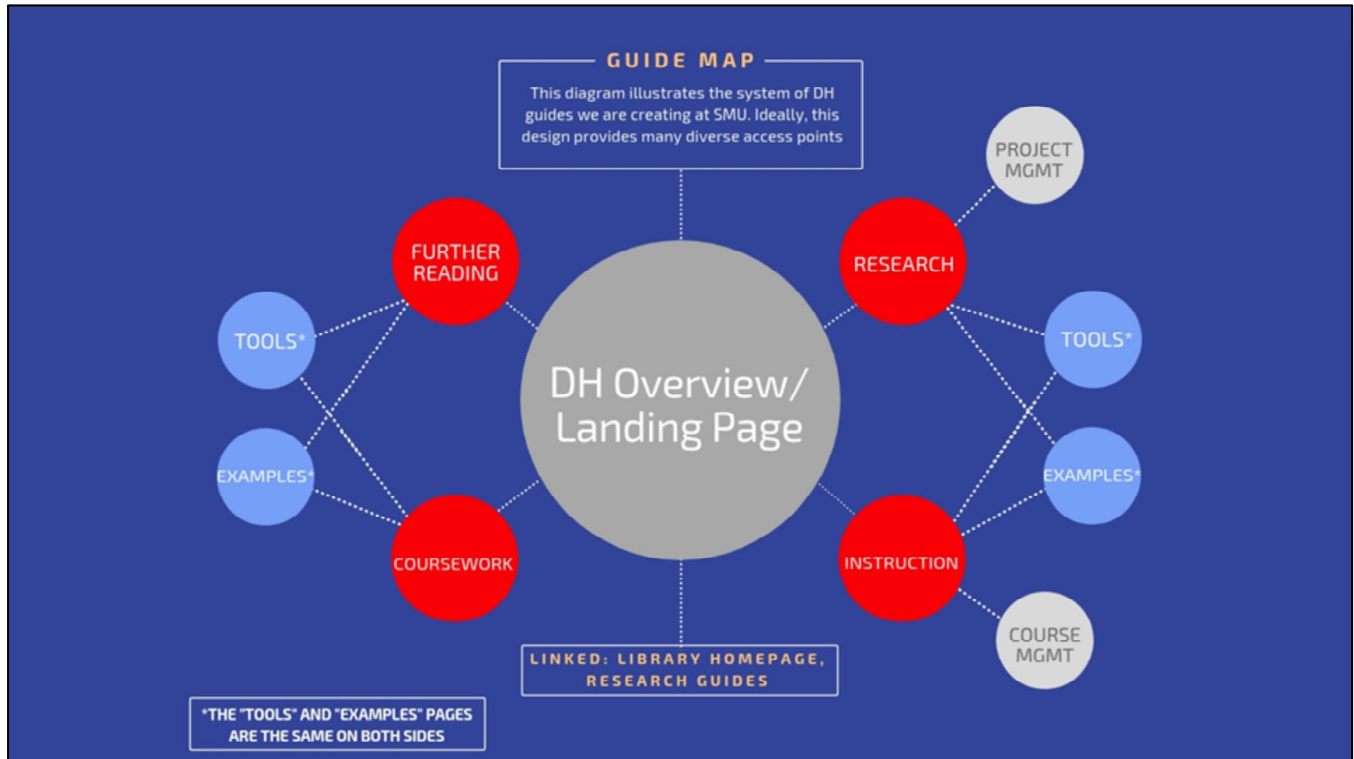
We had a lot of content -- rearranging the content was not the problem -- that is the UI solution. The UX solution is who is going to use this?

What do we know about the user?

- Who might be using this page?
- Questions, tasks, and expectations that users might bring to this page

How does this page work into the overall UX?

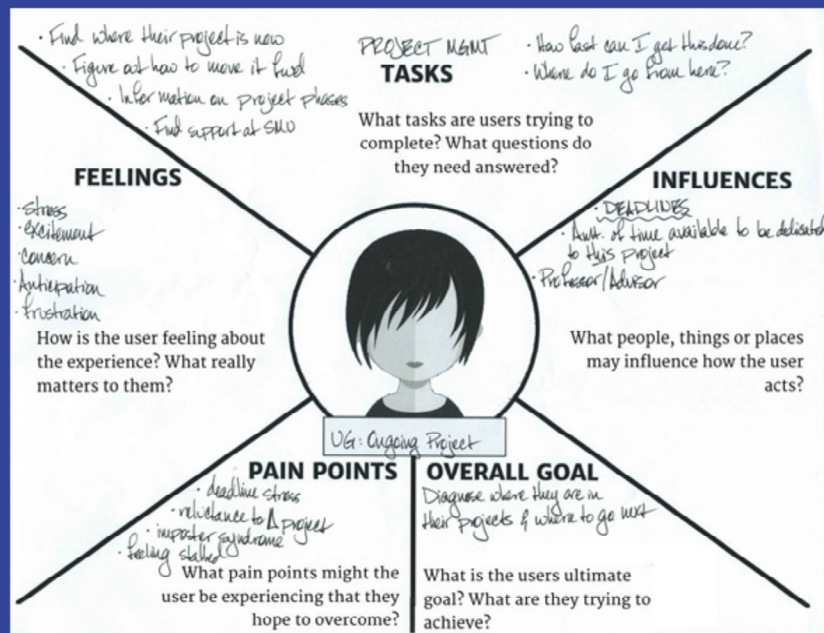
- What should this guide do for the user?
- What should this guide allow them to accomplish?



As we answered our guiding questions, we began to draw out a map of the “web” of guides we would be creating. This system would allow users to navigate depending on their individual needs. This structure changed as we worked and will likely continue to change.

PROTOTYPED - with Rafia

Test Cases/Empathy Mapping



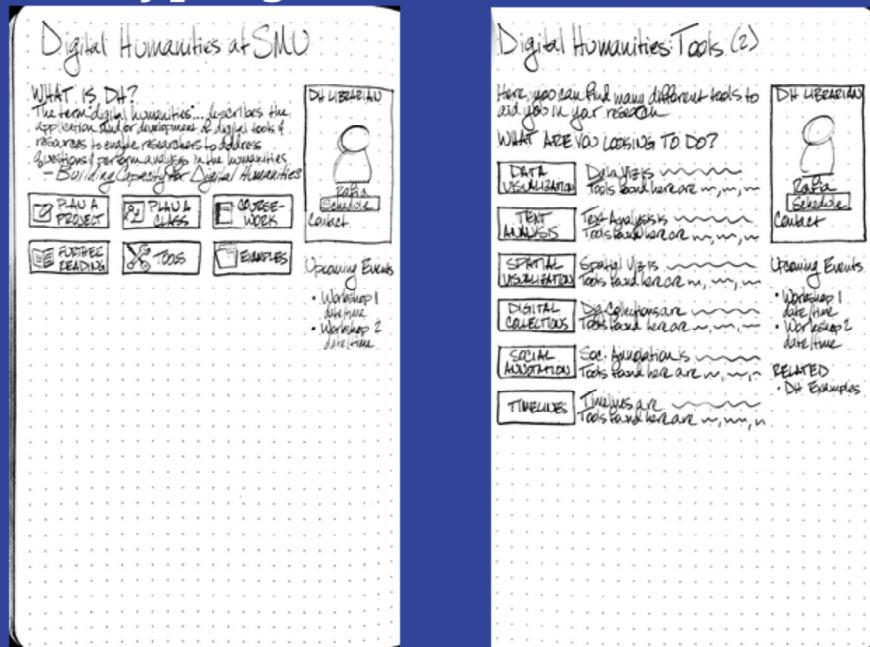
Margaret

Working with a DH expert, we created a list of potential users for each page. She provided valuable knowledge of who these scholars are. With this list, we then created Empathy Maps, which allow us to better get into the mind of the user and anticipate their needs.

Representing people, not just that understood DH, but people who didn't We worked in the middle, but the happened at the beginning and at the end of our process in concept

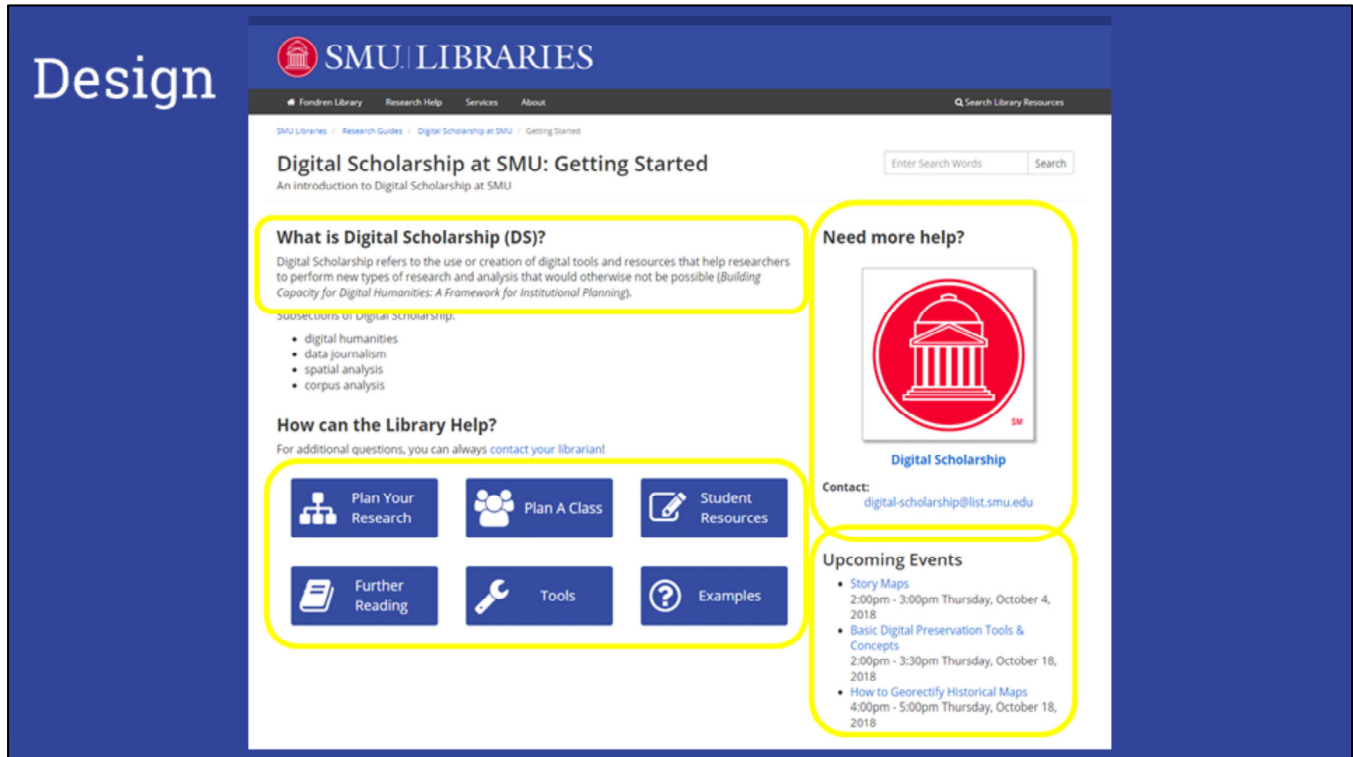
Design based off of rough EM's, and we test based on the EM's

Rapid Prototyping



The next step was to use what we had learned to create workable pages. Before going into Springshare, we first drew out options by hand. This allowed us to stay focused on the functionality of the page rather than the technical elements of creating it.

We presented these sketches -- helps you think more conceptually than with the details



Here is the page we were starting with
You will notice, there is a lot of great content, but it is very overwhelming, particularly to new users

1. Short definition, no need for prior knowledge
2. These buttons are designed to take away all superfluous text and to help the user tailor their experience to their specific needs
3. We have designed this contact section to mirror the profile boxes found on our other guides pages. While we do not have one person who is the contact point in DH, by the nature of the discipline, we want this to feel as personalized as possible. Users like to feel that there is a person behind this guide.

Margaret

After *all of that*, we created the actual pages for the website and linked them in the appropriate places. We are continuing to operate with the understanding that these pages will change (and have already changed several times) with the needs of SMU's researchers. We hope that these pages will successfully inspire and support DH scholars at SMU.

NOTE: DS -- here is why

Look how a person can make choices about who they are and how it might appeal to them

No matter how advanced or new

Take this page for example

-you can know exactly where you want to go, this is for you

-you can not know where to start, this is for you

-

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Questions?



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