



Open Library of Humanities



Part of the Ubiquity  
Partner Network

Digital Studies /  
Le champ numérique

---

## Research

**How to Cite:** Mukamal, Anna, Kate Moffatt, Kandice Sharren, and Claire Battershill. 2021. "Student Labour and Major Research Projects." *Digital Studies/Le champ numérique* 11(1): 2, pp. 1–33. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/dscn.375>

**Published:** 16 April 2021

---

## Peer Review:

This is a peer-reviewed article in *Digital Studies/Le champ numérique*, a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

## Copyright:

© 2020 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

## Open Access:

*Digital Studies/Le champ numérique* is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

## Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

---

## RESEARCH

# Student Labour and Major Research Projects

Anna Mukamal, Kate Moffatt, Kandice Sharren and Claire Battershill

---

This essay cluster addresses major Digital Humanities projects from the perspective of the graduate-student research assistants that work on them, focusing on practical and ethical questions about how DH relies on student labour. Cumulatively, this cluster asks how DH projects with feminist aims might integrate those aims into their own practices. Anna Mukamal's essay reflects on and theorizes how her role as Project Manager has provided opportunities for mentorship and collaboration outside of the traditional structures of academic supervision. In Mukamal's experience, the intergenerational and inter-institutional collaboration the Modernist Archives Publishing Project (MAPP) requires has allowed her to foster connections and knowledge that supplement and are adjacent to her graduate coursework and research. Kate Moffatt and Kandice Sharren use their experiences recovering women's largely invisible labour in the eighteenth-century book trades for the Women's Print History Project as a framework to consider what kind of labour might be rendered invisible by large-scale DH work. Their essay focuses on two types of work at risk of being overlooked: the work that goes into confirming an absence of data and the affective labour that goes into developing a team of research assistants. Claire Battershill responds to these essays by offering the perspective of a co-director of a major project that relies on student labour.

---

**Keywords:** project management; digital humanities (DH); critical digital archive; feminist praxis; student labour; digital pedagogy

---

Ce regroupement de dissertations aborde des projets majeurs des Humanités numériques du point de vue des assistants de recherche étudiant de cycle supérieur qui travaillent sur ces projets, en se concentrant sur des questions pratiques et éthiques concernant la façon dont les humanités numériques s'appuient sur le labeur d'étudiants. Ensemble, ce regroupement demande comment des projets des humanités numériques avec des objectifs féministes peuvent intégrer ces objectifs dans leurs propres pratiques. Dans sa dissertation, Anna Mukamal réfléchit et théorise sur la façon dont son rôle comme Gestionnaire de projet a fourni des opportunités pour du mentorat

et de la collaboration hors du cadre traditionnel de supervision académique. D'après les expériences de Mukamal, la collaboration intergénérationnelle et interinstitutionnelle que nécessite le *Modernist Archives Publishing Project* (Projet de publication d'archives modernistes) lui a permis d'entretenir des connections et connaissances qui enrichissent et qui sont liées à ses études supérieures et à sa recherche. Kate Moffatt et Kandice Sharren se servent de leurs expériences dans la récupération du labeur largement invisible fait par des femmes au dix-huitième siècle dans le domaine de livres pour le *Women's Print History Project* (Projet de l'histoire de publication par des femmes) comme cadre pour considérer quelle sorte de labeur peut être rendue invisible par le travail à grande échelle des humanités numériques. Leur dissertation se focalise sur deux types de travail en danger d'être négligés : le travail investi dans la confirmation d'un manque de données ainsi que le labeur affectif investi dans le développement d'une équipe d'assistants de recherche. Claire Battershill répond à ces dissertations en fournissant la perspective d'une co-directrice d'un projet majeur qui dépend du labeur d'étudiants.

---

**Mots-clés:** gestion de projet; humanités numériques (HN); archive numérique critique; pratique féministe; labeur d'étudiants; pédagogie

---

# Project Managing the Modernist Archives Publishing Project

Anna Mukamal

Stanford University, US  
amukamal@stanford.edu

---

## Introduction: Feminist digital humanities in the field

The Modernist Archives Publishing Project (MAPP) is a critical digital archive of twentieth-century publishing culture. It affords open access to born-digital, peer-reviewed scholarly research and high-quality digitizations of extensive materials lying in geographically dispersed brick-and-mortar archives. Created in 2012–2013 through the intellectual and professional connections of six modernist scholars working in three countries, MAPP is one of many scholarly outcomes of the rise of the Digital Humanities (DH), a field with many overlapping definitions, practitioners, and applications, yet which is premised on the idea “that computational technology can advance the long-standing goals of the humanities” (Price and Siemens 2013, para. 2). Among other archival DH projects such as the Modernist Journals Project (Modernist Journals Project, 2020), founded in 1995, MAPP’s initial imperative was to create and curate born-digital scholarly biographies about people and presses related to Virginia and Leonard Woolf’s Hogarth Press, established in 1917. With more than four thousand digitized artefacts in the site—including dust jackets, author and publisher correspondences, readers’ reports, printing and production papers, illustrations, and other ephemera—MAPP is currently expanding to other twentieth-century presses, from Dun Emer Press to Grove Press.

MAPP dovetails with a groundswell of critical consciousness around diasporic archives and the intersection of feminist and digital praxis. As Jacqueline Wernimont observed in 2015, special issues “often capture a moment in time, an efflorescence of critical engagement, or an urgent and timely shift in a field” (Wernimont 2015, para. 1). This shift is evidenced by (just to name a few) Wernimont’s 2015 special issue of *Digital Humanities Quarterly* on Feminisms in Digital Humanities; the

*Modernism/modernity* Print Plus cluster, “From Practice to Theory: A Forum on the Future of Modernist Digital Humanities” edited by Shawna Ross (2018); and the *Feminist Modernist Studies* special issue on Feminist Modernist Digital Humanities, co-edited by Amanda Golden and Cassandra Laity (2018). As Gabriel Hankins argues in “We Are All Digital Modernists Now,” such interventions signal that in the digital age, the way we conduct and bibliographically reference scholarship has irrevocably changed, such that “the relation between scholarly communities and digital practices must be treated as a mutual problem, rather than a special preserve of interest only to practitioners of the Digital Humanities” (Hankins 2018b, para. 13). The digital—and the rise of conceptual frameworks such as the network and interventions in the reading debates such as “weak theory” (Saint-Amour 2018)—inflects not only our meta-critical understanding of the capacities of literary criticism as such, but also the research questions governing our local analyses. In other words, digital tools have equipped us to probe unprecedented questions about twentieth-century literary production, from using data visualization software to map the geographic distribution of sales over time to creating web infrastructures for viewing and comparing geographically dispersed editions. DH project workflow also tends to be more collaborative, team-based, and interdisciplinary than traditional academic research production—a model presenting both immense promise and challenges requiring ongoing negotiation in the current publishing landscape, especially for the structurally vulnerable, graduate students in particular.

In what follows, I outline from the perspective of a mid-career graduate student the challenges and rewards of working as Project Manager (PM) on a major DH project—from building a scholarly network within and beyond my institutional context early in my coursework years to exploring cutting-edge digital tools and pedagogical models which incorporate them. These affordances and others have significantly impacted my independent research, prompting me to think always with, but also beyond dominant disciplinary practices such as close reading and historicist modes of analysis. Far outweighing the costs—collaborative work has always been critiqued for detracting from independent research, as if the two were not mutually

generative but rather perpetually in tension—working as PM for MAPP has catalyzed the development of my own research questions on both conceptual and practical levels. Fostering a more nuanced appreciation of the dialectical movement between conceptualising a large-scale project and the local acts of interpretive labour that slowly bring that project to fruition, PM work has rendered me less risk-averse and more comfortable manipulating many moving parts. There is considerable overlap between the skills vital to managing a collaborative DH project and a long-term independent research project. Perhaps most importantly, working as MAPP's PM has afforded a coterie of scholars—with whom I regularly engage in substantive dialogues that build towards shared intellectual goals—who remain, along with the invaluable mentors in my institution's formal advising structures, committed to my long-term professional development.

### **Part I: Project management in theory and practice**

As early as 2009, Lynne Siemens argued that DH research “typically involves the need to coordinate efforts between academics, undergraduate and graduate students, research assistants, computer programmers, librarians, and other individuals as well as the need to manage financial and other resources,” and it was precisely the goal of more systematised coordination that led the MAPP team to seek a PM in 2017. Yet “despite this use of collaboration,” Siemens discerned, “there has been little formal research on team development within this community” (Siemens 2009, 225). More recently, scholars have made similar assessments; while students are increasingly involved in, even vital to, the success of major DH projects (Anderson et al. 2016, para. 4), they often have limited opportunities to publish peer-reviewed articles or present at conferences about their work thereon (Anderson et al. 2016, pars. 10–11). This article addresses this critical gap by theorising the affordances and risks of working on a major DH project from the graduate student perspective, highlighting the ways in which these projects not only blur the hierarchical boundaries between existing scholarly roles, but also craft avenues toward new ones.

MAPP is best conceived as an umbrella entity under which multiple initiatives, an introduction to all of which can be found on our web resource, function in

tandem (Welcome, 2020). Because of MAPP's multi-pronged nature, the PM oversees the various projects within MAPP—ensuring that workflow proceeds as projected and intervening to redirect energies when necessary—while simultaneously participating in or leading a subset of these “nested” projects. One of the PM's guiding questions is how to integrate two of MAPP's imperatives which often compete for time and resources: on the one hand, building and expanding a web-based research resource with a positive user experience, and on the other, generating new born-digital scholarly biographies of presses and people related to the publishing industry, from typists to press managers to bookbinders and secretaries. Herein lies one of the fundamental generative tensions which the PM must navigate and signpost both to team members in monthly meetings and the outside world via blog posts and conference presentations. While one team member might be more invested and skilled in data ingestion and another in the intersection between metadata structure and ongoing research, the PM occupies the conceptual space between these initiatives, which can often be nebulous territory. The distinction between “participating in” and “organising” is to some extent artificial in that an effective PM must understand the stakes of each initiative in order to mediate and move between them, always exercising the metacognitive effort of describing how these initiatives are integrated into a common set of scholarly goals.

The PM's auto-reflexive thinking is essential to structuring accountability such that major project milestones are met and surpassed—and, for that matter, that these gains are legible to various funding bodies. From its inception, MAPP has been governed by the idea that “the hack/yack divide between building and theorising is not a binary, an either/or choice, but a dialectic, a both/and that leads to a new synthesis” (Battershill et al. 2017, 128). In overseeing the curation of born-digital biographies in a thoughtfully conceptualised, expandable metadata structure, my challenge as MAPP's PM is to balance the both/and dialectic between “hacking” (coding, the technical) and “yacking” (theorising, generating new scholarly knowledge and presenting it in new, more networked ways). It is incumbent upon student DH labourers to develop compelling ways of articulating to those unfamiliar with or

sceptical of these tools—those whose training perhaps did or does not navigate this hack/yack dialectic, or those who see digital methods as fundamentally in tension with “literary” ones—the value, both conceptual and professional, in situating oneself as a graduate student within a network of like-minded scholars at various stages of their careers. In some ways, working as MAPP’s PM feels affectively akin to conducting old-school archival research, but at a larger scale. One enters the archive without knowing exactly what one is “looking for,” but one rarely emerges without what turns out to be a crucial lead, ushered in by a reinvigorating sense of awe. In short, while PM work, just as traditional archival work, can sometimes lead to frustrating dead ends, it also cultivates a salutary facility with contingency and process, an openness to being surprised, and a commitment to building connections iteratively over time.

This flexibility and self-direction—the ability to mediate between separate, yet connected tasks without explicit top-down instructions, and to creatively solve problems as they arise—is central to the PM ethos. As such, the PM must be committed to the scholarly and pedagogic mission of the DH project as a whole, carrying these principles out on the level of weekly pragmatic tasks. For example, my responsibilities can be organised into two broad categories: inward- and outward-facing. Taking a cue from Katrina Anderson et al. (2016), who have established a list of “best practices” designed “to help student and faculty researchers foster and maintain strong, collaborative relationships across levels of experience” (Anderson et al. 2016, para. 27), maintaining dynamic lists of team member responsibilities is productive for both personal and team accountability. In a given working week on the inward-facing “yacking” side, I facilitate clear communication about conceptual and logistical developments, which includes managing threads on Basecamp, our web-based project management tool, and serving as an ever-present consulting and editorial voice. I also plan and facilitate team Zoom meetings, taking detailed minutes with updates and individualised action items for each team member. On the “hack” side, I publish scholarly biographies in Drupal, our web content management platform, which requires understanding how various functionalities and modules inform our sitewide metadata structure.



Similar to the hack/yack dialectic, inward- and outward-facing roles are not distinct but in fact mutually reinforce one another. The outward-facing capacities of my role include soliciting biographies by expert scholars in target areas and conducting the external review process, as well as interfacing with contributors to manage workflow and publication timelines. I often also serve as an internal reviewer, practising valuable editorial skills as I work with texts-in-progress from undergraduate and graduate students and scholars from around the world. Finally, I facilitate MAPP's social media and blog presence, crafting narratives about our conceptual interventions that are meaningful to different audiences. These inward- and outward-facing responsibilities cohere in grant-funded Team Summits, which prioritise in-person collaborative work time, professional development days, presentation of recent research, and opportunities for networking with scholars working in similar or adjacent fields (for example, the "Women/Gender Minorities in Print/Publishing in the Long Twentieth Century" Symposium at Stanford's Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis in July 2019, which I co-organised with Alice Staveley). As the MAPP team writes of its metadata structure in their collaboratively-written book, "We are creating a knowledge system bigger than our individual parts; the Bourdieusian 'field' enriches our work but also moves outwards to those whose ideas, interactions, and interpretations of it are—by design—outside our immediate visual field" (Battershill et al. 2017, 57). Working in tandem with the hack/yack dichotomy intentionally destabilised by MAPP is the tension between inward development and outward-facing initiatives—which, as my theorisation of the PM role suggests, is by design a both/and.

## **Part II: Collaboration and intergenerational mentorship: Evidencing and practising feminist pedagogy**

MAPP is a feminist modernist project not only because it intentionally reveals connections between understudied figures of modernist book production, creating space for recuperative histories of twentieth-century publishing culture, but also in the way the team is structured and managed. As PM, I have learned that the labour of making and growing MAPP is consonant with how books are made collaboratively in stages. From the mutually-constructive perspectives of book history, textual

criticism, and material culture, process is as important—and as worthy of scholarly attention—as product. As scholars have recently noted, “DH projects can interrogate commonly held notions of cultural value and canonicity by situating the text as an unstable and potentially interactive site” (Anderson et al. 2016, para. 21). In other words, MAPP’s theoretical interventions throw into relief a given work’s stages of becoming and the manifold forms of labour which enable it. On a meta-critical level, MAPP intervenes precisely by foregrounding and theorising the labour of *making*, prompting a re-evaluation of the relationship between editorial work and literary criticism as such. As Kenneth M. Price and Ray Siemens observe in their introduction to the MLA Commons “evolving anthology,” *Literary Studies in the Digital Age*,

The digital turn has also changed and reinvigorated a foundational element of scholarly work: textual editing. The standing of editors has been problematic for decades, in part because editorial work frequently has been dismissed as precritical. However, digital texts raise far-reaching questions about the nature of textuality, giving a new (or more apparent) theoretical significance to editorial work. (Price and Siemens 2013, para. 8)

Connecting the disciplines of “book history and textual theory with editorial theory and digital practice” has engendered an “infrastructure [which] itself is a form of argument about how to use digital technologies to equalize the playing field between user and maker, theorist and archivist, scholar and student” (Battershill et al. 2017, 50). If the critical digital archive’s infrastructure itself constitutes an argument, editorial work can no longer be seen as precritical; as a form of labour, then, it regains crucial theoretical import, and, I argue, should be central to any rigorous methodological training in graduate-level literary study.

It is a critical commonplace that the question of labour, particularly under-recognized labour, is always a feminist one. MAPP’s collaborative ethos responds to calls for “revolutioniz[ing] the student labour model by rendering the invisible student visible” (Anderson et al. 2016, para. 26). While I, as a PhD candidate, identify with this imperative, I am attuned to similar arguments of other “frequently precarious” DH labourers who “occupy a startling range of positions: administrators, adjuncts,

postdocs, graduate and undergraduate students, tenure-track and contingent faculty, librarians, archivists, programmers, IT and edtech specialists, consultants, museum curators, artists, authors, editors, and more" (Boyles et al. 2018, 693). As the authors of "Precarious Labor and the Digital Humanities" note, when DH labour is performed by those with commitments to other precarious fields such as feminist studies or disability studies, it becomes increasingly important to "recognize the many ways in which the value of [this] labor has been challenged, taken for granted, dismissed outright, or explained away" (Boyles et al. 2018, 693). The stakes, in other words, are not just rendering visible student labour, but rather all "forms of digital labor and the agents behind this labor" (Boyles et al. 2018, 693).

According to Price, it is this self-reflexive "conscious collaboration (as well as some difference in types of collaboration) that distinguishes digital scholarship from more traditional models" (Price 2010, 10). This point bears underscoring—digital projects tend to foster both intentional awareness of the affordances of collaboration *and* unique kinds of collaboration. As Price notes, "Frequently, major digital projects provide graduate research assistants with real responsibilities and opportunities that far exceed those given to assistants on print-based projects" (Price 2010, 18). While this is certainly true, it is striking that of the scholarship on collaboration in DH, "very little deals with students as collaborators or active participants in the projects whose success depends, to a great degree, on their labour" (Anderson et al. 2016, para. 4). The manifold, yet undertheorised value of the student PM identity thus offers up new ways of conceptualising pedagogy and training within graduate programs, casting intergenerational mentorship as the cornerstone of research work rather than a felicitous but not-strictly-necessary by-product.

Jerome McGann, the American counterpart of book historian and "sociology of texts" theorist D. F. McKenzie, famously argued that both bibliographic and computational skills—though not often central to humanities graduate curricula—are essential for the next scholarly generation (Battershill et al. 2017, 11). Indeed, his visionary 2008 article, "The Future is Digital," insists on "the direct connection between book-historical methods and digital humanities" (Battershill et al. 2017, 11). Price and Siemens similarly assert that the digital age has altered the "types of

education and training the academy needs to offer” (Price and Siemens 2013, para. 1; Anderson et al. 2016, para. 12). In addition to featuring the work of scholars, MAPP’s born-digital scholarly biography model affords a valuable pedagogical tool for undergraduate- and graduate-level instruction, revealing the affective and material labour of conducting recovery work within a collaborative work structure. As Price and Siemens put it, “The audience in digital humanities is also at times transformed from a receiver of content to a cocreator of content” (Price and Siemens 2013, para. 10). Writing a biography for consideration in the MAPP resource—an assignment frequently given by our collaborators teaching modernism, book history, or feminist studies courses—is often a student’s first encounter with the difficulty of constructing narratives from (always partial, usually diasporic, sometimes not digitized) archives. This is an invaluable opportunity for students to conduct research, especially on understudied figures or figures for whom the historical record is scant or unwieldy, which is then peer reviewed by a MAPP team member, the PM, and an external reviewer expert on that figure or their milieu, ultimately producing a rigorously-researched, open-access, peer reviewed born-digital piece. In a sense, such a pursuit does for the twentieth century what Woolf’s narrator dreams of doing in *A Room of One’s Own*: reading the unwritten histories of Elizabethan women, “those obscure women in the past, of whom I wish we knew more” (Woolf [1929] 2005, 107).

In editorial work and beyond, the PM’s unique positionality constitutes a mediatory role, interfacing not only with pioneering DH center leaders and scholars in modernism, book history, and material culture, but also with students involved with their research. For example, after MAPP team members and I have virtually visited courses, I have edited collaboratively-written essays, such as those by the students of J. Ashley Foster’s “Literature & Digital Humanities” graduate seminar (English) at California State University, Fresno and Matthew Hannah’s “Introduction to the Digital Humanities” graduate seminar (Information and Library Sciences) at Purdue University (Hillner et al. 2019; Taylor et al. 2019). This editorial experience affords me a vantage to the rich (and always enriching) social media landscape which, as Price and Siemens note, “can, potentially, advance scholarship even while

opening our work to audiences more vast and varied than was previously feasible” (Price and Siemens 2013, para. 1). Indeed, while an academic monograph generally sells “several hundred copies,” “some open-access digital-literary projects now have tens of thousands of unique visitors in a single month” (Price and Siemens 2013, para. 10). Yet it bears noting that this paradigm involves more than just a shift in *scale* of audience. Insofar as MAPP is designed to “equalize the playing field between user and maker, theorist and archivist, scholar and student” (Battershill et al. 2017, 50), it extends and harnesses interest in scholarly work to broader audiences, from secondary school students to amateur historiographers to book enthusiasts writ large.

Working as PM fosters interinstitutional, intergenerational collaboration and non-hierarchical mentorship that benefits differently-staged careers in different ways. One utility of meta-critical scholarship on DH projects from the graduate student perspective, then, is theorising “a model of training that formally recognizes the value of mentorship, what Michael Hardt terms ‘affective labour’” (Anderson et al. 2016, para. 35). In addition to building a network of scholars across the country and world, I have gained skills adjacent, but not traditionally central, to graduate education, such as understanding how various institutions facilitate and evaluate unconventional academic output; how the grant-writing process works and how granting agencies (NEH, ACLA, SSHRC, etc.) assess proposals; how the backend of peer review functions; and how to communicate effectively around shared interests with faculty outside of formal advising structures. This exposure to aspects of institutional process and workflow acquaints me with, and allows me to practice early in my graduate training, the interpersonal skills required to perform these and other kinds of university service and interinstitutional shared work.

Perhaps most importantly for an early- to mid-career graduate student, working as PM for MAPP has deepened my specialised content knowledge in twentieth-century studies in a sustained and innovative way that no single quarter-length course could offer. Understanding the conceptual underpinnings of MAPP’s metadata structure equips me to ask entirely new questions about twentieth-century literary production,

merging critical digital archival praxis with recuperative feminism(s), book historical, literary sociological, and computational methodological angles alongside more traditional formalist and historicist modes. As Golden and Laity write in their introduction to the aforementioned special issue of *Feminist Modernist Studies*, “feminist DH is also ‘about women,’ diversity, sex/gender issues, and contemporary feminist awareness” (Golden and Laity 2018, 206). In this vein, exploring how and why material publishing practices shaped modernism and feminism by learning the backend of the critical digital archive’s networked infrastructure has revealed the import of the “conjunction between digital method and the field of modernist studies” (Saint-Amour 2018, 440). This affective and methodological orientation toward the field and my objects of study leads to a shared imperative, articulated by Hankins, to employ weak theory to “theorize the process of affiliation, conjunction, translation, and alliance between methods and subjects, and to redescribe the work of digital modernist studies as the careful, conscious ‘plaiting of weak ties’ between method, object, and field” (Hankins 2018a, 570). This is to say that working as MAPP’s PM has concretised Bonnie Kime Scott’s “A Tangled Mesh of Modernists” as both a useful conceptual construct for twentieth-century publishing culture—insofar as “the inextricable interrelatedness of authors, publishers, editors, printers, and audiences [is] manifested in the physical book and its bibliographic codes” (Battershill et al. 2017, 76)—and an ever-vital reality of collaborative, intergenerational mentorship in scholarly networks today.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am deeply grateful to the MAPP team—Claire Battershill, Helen Southworth, Alice Staveley, Michael Widner, Elizabeth Willson Gordon, and Nicola Wilson—for the opportunity to work as Project Manager. Thank you to MAPP’s undergraduate Research Assistants at Stanford: Emily Elott, Peter Morgan, Victoria Ding, and Cherie Xu. Many thanks to Elaine Treharne for her course on archival theory and practice, her leadership of the Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis (CESTA), and her invaluable mentorship; to Mark Algee-Hewitt for the introduction to computational methods in his Scalar Reading and Advanced Methods in DH courses, his visionary directorship of the Literary Lab, and his unflagging mentorship; to Quinn Dombrowski for her

Drupal expertise; and to Stanford's Department of English and CESTA for their institutional support. Thank you to Jason Parks, Courtney Taylor, and Patrick Collier—co-participants of the 2018 Modernist Studies Association panel, “Translating the Image in *transition* (1927–1938)”—for a foundational chance to theorise the intersections between feminist and critical digital archival praxis. Many thanks to Matthew Hannah and J. Ashley Foster for their invitations to collaborate in classroom contexts and facilitate critical reflections, and to Adam Hammond, Gabriel Hankins, Laura McGrath, and J.D. Porter for being such welcoming DHers in the field. My warmest thanks to Michaela Bronstein, Terry Castle, Gavin Jones, and Mark McGurl for their ongoing mentorship and brilliance, and for the friendship and inspiration of too many Stanford colleagues to name here. Finally, thank you to the external peer reviewer and the co-editors of this special issue, Colette Colligan, Michelle Levy, Kimberly O'Donnell, and Kandice Sharren, for their initiative, invitation, and expert organization.

### Competing interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

### Editorial contributions

**Guest Editor, DSCN Student Issue 2020:** Kandice Sharren.

**Section Editor/Copy Editor:** Darcy Tamayose, The Journal Incubator, University of Lethbridge, Canada.

**Copy Editor/Bibliographies Manager:** Shahina Parvin, The Journal Incubator, University of Lethbridge, Canada.

### References

- Anderson, Katrina, Lindsey Bannister, Janey Dodd, Deanna Fong, Michelle Levy, and Lindsey Seatter.** 2016. “Student Labour and Training in Digital Humanities.” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 10(1): n.p. <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/10/1/000233/000233.html>.
- Battershill, Claire, Helen Southworth, Alice Staveley, Michael Widner, Elizabeth Willson Gordon, and Nicola Wilson.** 2017. *Scholarly Adventures*

*in Digital Humanities: Making The Modernist Archives Publishing Project*. New Directions in Book History. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Boyles, Christina, Anne Cong-Huyen, Carrie Johnston, Jim McGrath, and Amanda Phillips.** 2018. "Precarious Labor and the Digital Humanities." *American Quarterly* 70(3): 693–700. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2018.0054>
- Golden, Amanda, and Cassandra Laity.** 2018. "Feminist Modernist Digital Humanities." *Feminist Modernist Studies* 1(3): 205–210. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/24692921.2018.1503786>
- Hankins, Gabriel.** 2018a. "The Weak Powers of Digital Modernist Studies." *Modernism/Modernity* 25(3): 569–85. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2018.0040>
- . 2018b. "We Are All Digital Modernists Now." Edited by Shawna Ross. *Modernism/Modernity Print Plus* 3(2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26597/mod.0054>
- Hillner, Josiah D., Jennifer Alonzo, Robert J. Breuer, Megan Day Evans, Emily Froese, J. Ashley Foster, Esmeralda Gamez, Anna Marie Gonzalez, Emanuell Hernandez, Leann Lewis-Ramirez, Ahlam Khadra, Isabella Lo, Kaitlin C. Meier, Michael Reynoso, and Riley Thomas.** 2018. "MAPP Visits Literature and DH Graduate Seminar at California State University, Fresno." In *Modernist Archives Publishing Project*, edited by Anna Mukamal. Accessed July 12, 2020. <http://modernistarchives.com/content/mapp-visits-literature-and-dh-graduate-seminar-at-california-state-university-fresno>.
- Modernist Journals Project.** 2020. Resources for the Study of Modernism in the English-speaking World. Accessed July 13. <https://modjournal.org>.
- Price, Kenneth M.** 2010. "Collaborative Work and the Conditions for American Literary Scholarship in a Digital Age." In *The American Literature Scholar in the Digital Age*, edited by Amy E. Earhart and Andrew Jewell, 9–26. Editorial Theory and Literary Criticism. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Price, Kenneth M., and Ray Siemens.** 2013. "Introduction." In *MLA Commons. Literary Studies in the Digital Age: An Evolving Anthology*. Accessed July 12, 2020. <https://dlsanthology.mla.hcommons.org/introduction/>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1632/lstda.2013.1>



- Ross, Shawna.** 2018. "From Practice to Theory: A Forum on the Future of Modernist Digital Humanities." *Modernism/Modernity Print Plus* 3(2): n.p. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26597/mod.0053>
- Saint-Amour, Paul K.** 2018. "Weak Theory, Weak Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity* 25(3): 437–59. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2018.0035>
- Siemens, Lynne.** 2009. "It's a Team If You Use 'Reply All': An Exploration of Research Teams in Digital Humanities Environments." *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 24(2): 225–33. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/lc/fqp009>
- Taylor, E. P., Amanda Leary, Alejandra Ortega, Bo Blew, Daniel Carrillo Jara, Margaret Sheble, Sunyoung Kim, and Shiyu Zhang.** 2019. "Virginia Woolf in the Digital Humanities Seminar." Edited by Anna Mukamal. <http://modernistarchives.com/content/virginia-woolf-in-the-digital-humanities-seminar>.
- Welcome.** 2020. Modernist Archives Publishing Project. Accessed May 08, 2019. <http://modernistarchives.com/>.
- Wernimont, Jacqueline.** 2015. "Introduction to Feminisms and DH Special Issue." *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 009(2): n.p. <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/9/2/000217/000217.html>.
- Woolf, Virginia.** 1929. *A Room of One's Own*. Edited by Mark Hussey, annotated and with an introduction by Susan Gubar. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2005.

# Absence and Feeling: Documenting Invisible Labour on The Women's Print History Project

Kate Moffatt and Kandice Sharren

Simon Fraser University, CA

klmoffat@sfu.ca; ksharren@sfu.ca

---

## Introduction

The Women's Print History Project (WPHP) (Levy and Sharren 2019) is a bibliographical database that seeks to account for all books that women were involved in producing during the period, as authors, editors, and translators; but also in the book trades, as printers, publishers, and booksellers. By collecting detailed bibliographical information about these books, we aim to enable large-scale analysis of how women engaged with print, beginning by answering the question: during a long Romantic period, how many books were women involved in producing? While we remain unable to definitively answer that question, we can respond by saying: many thousands more than we expected. Contributing to this number have been the books produced by women working in the book trades during the latter half of the eighteenth century, a demographic that has largely been hidden by what Hannah Barker describes as the "assum[ption] that women were necessarily forced out of the workplace at the end of the eighteenth century" (Barker 1997, 84), and the probability that, during this period, "they continued to perform the type of low-status, low-skilled jobs that had always characterized women's work" (Barker 1997, 82). The status of this work is reflected by the scattered and piecemeal nature of its surviving evidence, which we have been working to find and amalgamate in order to make it visible to literary and book historians. Despite our best efforts, much of the information we have searched for remains inaccessible through the sources available, drawing our attention to another kind of hidden labour: the work that goes into *not* finding.

Recent discussions of collaboration and labour on Digital Humanities projects have focused on the ethics of relying on a precarious workforce, often made up of students, to complete easily overlooked work. The use of student labour, in particular, presents a number of challenges to the rhetoric of collaboration infused in DH. In “Student Labour and Training in Digital Humanities,” Anderson et al. survey the gap between how student researchers perceive their work and how faculty researchers understand the work that their students do: what faculty members consider “collaborative” is not always viewed as such by their student employees (Anderson et al. 2016). However, even those projects and initiatives that do not rely on student researchers have a fraught relationship to precarious labour. Digital scholarship’s precarity is due to a combination of the lack of institutional memory around how to assess digital scholarship and the fact that many positions that are explicitly digital are temporary; these problems are compounded by the fact that “[a]sking early career scholars to support the research of advanced scholars flips the mentorship framework and it can leave less time in the work week to devote to writing for scholarly publications and university presses, forms of labor that remain privileged components of many tenure and promotion review protocols” (Boyles et al. 2018, 695). In general, practitioners of Digital Humanities projects respond to the problem of invisible labour with calls for documentation of the behind-the-scenes work involved in completing digital projects; Roxanne Shirazi argues that documentation shifts emphasis from product to process (Shirazi 2016), while Boyles et al. claim that the documentary impulse will contribute to making precarious labour across the humanities visible more generally (Boyles et al. 2018).

However, not all types of labour are easily documented. While the processes of collecting, entering, and editing data can be tracked, the affective labour of collaboration is more difficult to quantify and record: how do you document the fatigue of trying and failing to find the necessary information for a record? For twenty records in a row? How do you create and maintain a sense of community in a constantly shifting team comprised of undergraduate students, M.A. students, PhD candidates, and tenured faculty members? And how might that sense of community serve to obscure the ways in which this work is precarious and potentially exploitative?

In this article, we—Kandice Sharren (Lead Editor; Project Manager) and Kate Moffatt (Lead Editor, Firms)—use our roles as student researchers for the WPHP to argue for documentation of different types of invisible labour, as fundamental to our research into the invisible labour eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women performed in the book trades. In particular, we argue for the necessity of accounting for the kinds of work, including affective and emotional, that evade conventional documentation practices.

### **The work of not-finding**

Much of the focus of feminist recovery projects has been on the recovery of individual female authors and their texts, ensuring that they are studied by scholars and taught in courses. However, as Jean I. Marsden has pointed out, these recovery efforts are subject to our own biases; she cites an “unconscious desire to read ourselves into our foremothers” (Marsden 2002), as one of the reasons why some women—often those onto whom something recognizable as proto-feminism can be grafted—are read and taught at the expense of others. Beyond political biases, our understanding of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century print culture is driven by twentieth- and twenty-first-century hierarchies of genre—that is, what kinds of texts have literary and cultural value—rather than a representative sample of all publications. While Marsden calls for self-scrutiny as a strategy for correcting these imbalances, such an approach is limited in its efficacy; after all, there are only so many books that individual scholars can read, and some degree of selection is necessary. This is not to suggest that the big-data model of the WPHP is without biases of its own, but that a plurality of supplementary methodologies provides an opportunity to understand print, and women’s involvement in it.

By aiming to include every book published “in Britain and Ireland, and, eventually, America, and France” between 1700 and 1836 that involved a woman in its production, the WPHP seeks to complicate existing narratives about how women engaged in print. It does so through a relational data model that accounts for individual titles, as well as the people and firms involved in their creation, production, and dissemination. Our interest in detailed bibliographic data for titles and basic

biographical, geographical, and temporal data for people and firms is evident in the number of fields for each type of record in the WPHP: title records contain twenty-three fields, person records contain eleven, and firm records only six. Less evident, however, is the amount of time and effort necessary for collecting—or attempting to collect—data in all three categories. Every record in the database, be it for a title, a person, or a firm, has a threshold it must meet to be considered complete. The requirements for titles are the most rigorous: there must be at least two sources containing either detailed bibliographical information for the title or a digitised copy cited for each record. When two such sources have been found, the title is labeled “verified”; if we have tried and failed to find appropriate sources, we label the record “attempted verification.”

While the sheer amount of data we aim to collect for every title may appear responsible for our difficulties in finding sources that fit our criteria, we face similar difficulties in finding appropriate and accurate resources when attempting to verify person and firm records. Although we are searching for basic biographical, geographic, and temporal data for person and firm records, that basic information is challenging to find. As Lead Editor of firms, Moffatt has become increasingly aware of the amount of invisible labour required to include accurate and specific data about firms. Information about firms during our period is currently spread across multiple, occasionally contradictory sources, and reconciling those sources—when it is even possible—involves a surprising depth of research. Collecting this data, not only for firms, but also title and person records, requires detail-oriented researchers: including incorrect data about a firm, for example, may snowball into inaccuracies in our person records and associated titles. The level of attention to detail that these efforts require, alongside the already difficult task of finding accurate sources, creates an additional level of labour for researchers; what can appear to others as simple data entry is the result of careful, research-intensive data creation.

For example, the information about printer Ann Rivington in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography's (ODNB) entry about the Rivington family indicates that she was only active in the book trades or included in imprints between 1785

and 1790, the years immediately following her husband, John Rivington's death. The entry reads, "initially the printing business at 5 Badger Yard, St. John's Square, London was taken over by John's wife, Ann [Anna] Rivington [Burge] (1756–1841)." It goes on to suggest that Rivington's involvement in the business was short-lived: "In 1790 the firm took in the master printer Deodatus Bye and traded as Rivington, Marshall, and Bye. In the following year the firm was styled simply Marshall and Bye, suggesting that Ann Rivington had withdrawn from active involvement in printing" (Fitzpatrick 2004). This was the information we included in the WPHP for Ann Rivington's firm, assuming it correct—we did not yet have any of her titles included in the database. However, when we recently pulled up all of the titles connected to Ann Rivington's firms, we found that every title of hers we added since first entering data for her firm are from *after 1800*, including three Easter psalms printed in 1825, 1827, and 1828, with imprints that indicate that even these late publications were printed at the original address of John Rivington's business. The data provided by the imprints included in our title records suggests that Ann Rivington was not only active beyond the dates indicated by the ODNB entry, but that her activity continued for more than thirty years after it claims that she stopped participating in the business. While a succession of other partners did, indeed, print from the address in St. John's Square with which Ann Rivington was associated, the evidence that we have suggests a more complex arrangement than that she simply withdrew.

In this case, the data offered by a generally reliable source (the ODNB) was contradicted by our own title data, which we drew from records of books held by the Osborne Collection at the Toronto Public Library, as well as books that we examined while conducting research at the British Library. The research required to create a basic narrative about this single woman's involvement in the book trades involved the amalgamation of multiple sources, which was enabled only by our own database. What we know about Ann Rivington's presence in the book trades remains limited; until we find more data, we can only speculate as to the extent of her involvement in her firm after 1790. More significantly, because of her familial relationship with the Rivington family, Ann Rivington is more visible and better documented than

most women working in the book trades during this period. If thirty years of her printing career managed to pass unnoticed by historians of the Rivington family, what does this mean for the records of less prominent female printers, publishers, and booksellers?

The difficulty lies primarily in our project's focus on women, whose entries in existing sources, when included at all, are consistently and frustratingly vague. Women in the book trades are often invisible due to working the "low-skilled, low-status jobs" that Barker suggests, but even those who played more prominent roles in a printing or bookselling business are frequently eclipsed by the men in their lives. Information about them is frequently hidden within entries about male publishers, printers, or booksellers as a result of a familial relationship: when male publishers died, it was not uncommon for their wives to continue the businesses temporarily or long-term. Entries in pre-existing resources are consistently dedicated to the husband in those publishing relationships; sources name them fully and provide clear documentation of their work in the trades. Their wives, on the other hand, despite their importance to these businesses, are frequently identified as "Mrs." or "his widow," framing them as husband-adjacent and -reliant. Similar difficulties arise from partnerships between mother and son, and sister and brother, and the obfuscation of these women's work requires persistence and time on the part of the research assistants endeavouring to include them: discovering their names, the gender of the owner, the street address and city of their firm, and the start and end dates of their operation becomes a task more about amalgamating bits and pieces to create cohesive data than about finding a single, detailed source. In a best case scenario, the work that the research assistants do will result in all six fields being filled in a firm record but, even when successful, the hours of work required to hunt down this accurate information can also become obfuscated by the limited amount of tangible evidence that it does ultimately render visible.

Given these unanticipated roadblocks—namely, a lack of sources that include detailed information about women in the book trades—our data collection process is a living one that requires constant adaptation to reflect both successful and

unsuccessful research. The “attempted verification” label for titles was only added to the database in 2018, to indicate to both future users and our own research team which records we have tried, and failed, to appropriately source. Similarly, the process of identifying female-run firms required us to reconsider the fields in our firm records; in April 2019, we added a “gender” field that would allow us to indicate and therefore render searchable all of the firms that included a woman in a named partner role. In this way, the database is constantly being updated to improve our workflow and reflect new kinds of information that we did not anticipate.

It is not only our workflow, however, that has and will continue to adapt to new challenges: our documentation practices have also shifted, informed by our ever-growing awareness of the amount of invisible work that goes into creating data. While we do produce tangible evidence of our labour—the data that makes up the database—that evidence does not transparently indicate the hours required to find and amalgamate it. To make the amount of work required visible, we are in the process of drafting official documentation for the site. Breaking down the process will indicate to anyone who views the database the level of attention, detail, and patience required to provide the consistent and accurate information it offers. We are also integrating informal strategies like blog posts to centre the work of the research team. Providing a space for team members to display the efforts of our labour as well as how the project overlaps with our research interests allows for not only an acknowledgement of the hours we put in, but also an acknowledgement of the investments we have in the project beyond our contribution to its data output.

### **Documenting feeling**

Our data model is driven by principles of feminist recovery, not only in terms of how we understand the collective system of *print*, but also through how we seek to acknowledge the collective work that goes into a project of this scale. Our project statement prioritises student collaboration as fully as possible; in it, we cite Anderson et al., who observe, “the rhetoric of DH —of collaboration, accessibility, and freedom from traditional hierarchy—can obscure those structures that are already



in place within this community” (Anderson et al. 2016). However, ensuring that collaboration is prioritised also requires work that is all too easily overlooked. Thus, the remainder of this article turns from the mechanics of the project to the work of project management, namely the affective labour involved in fostering collaboration, in order to argue for its centrality to understanding and accounting for the human component of Digital Humanities.

While the challenges of documenting data collection and workflow are manifold, especially in instances where data cannot be found, practices do exist that allow this work to be accounted for. However, embedded within these practices is the affective work that goes into collaborating with a diverse group of students, faculty, librarians, and developers, not all of whom have expertise in the same discipline. Logsdon et al. comment on the opportunities afforded by the collaborative nature of digital projects, arguing that “librarians’ liminal position within the academy [ ... ] prepares and situates [them] to not only make unique contributions to DH, but to shape the development of the field” (Logsdon, Mars, and Tompkins 2017, 156), through the often invisible affective labour of “bring[ing] together scholars across disciplines, acting as a catalyst for creative change within the academy” (Logsdon, Mars, and Tompkins 2017, 155). By making this work visible, Logsdon et al. highlight the affective dimension of discourse mediation as an essential component of the work that goes into interdisciplinary collaboration on digital projects.

But the affective labour of mediation is not limited to cross-disciplinary collaboration, nor are the only people who perform it trained professionals. Librarians’ training prepares them for their mediating role, even if it remains undervalued; however, many DH projects require collaboration between students and faculty within the context of a team and without outside mediating influences. In the context of the WPHP, this team has consisted of a constantly shifting group of student research assistants from different disciplines, with different skills and knowledge. Between January 2015 and the time of writing this article, in May 2019, the WPHP has employed fifteen student researchers, including the authors of this piece: one (Sharren) began work on the project as a PhD student, ultimately taking

on the role of project manager; one began as an M.A. student; and the remaining thirteen began as undergraduate research assistants hired through university-wide initiatives aimed at supporting undergraduate involvement in faculty projects. While many of the students hired have been English majors, we have also drawn students from other departments at Simon Fraser University, including Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies; Linguistics; and Political Science. In addition to the diversity of disciplines, we have had to contend with high turnover: students hired through the university bursary programs often only work for the project for a semester or two, although some work on the project in a longer-term capacity and two have continued working on the project throughout their subsequent graduate work.

Fostering a collaborative spirit among a diverse group of students whose investment and involvement in the project can vary widely has presented a unique set of challenges, especially given the project's emphasis on revealing hidden forms of collective work. Although some degree of hierarchy is inevitable given the different levels of students and their experience on the project, we seek to minimise it by acknowledging the different needs and goals of individual members of the team, and the potential tensions between them. As the sole PhD student on the project and one of the original research assistants, Sharren occupied a liminal space between undergraduate student and faculty similar to that described by Logsdon et al.; she was well-positioned to mediate between the longer-term, research-oriented goals of the principal investigator and the shorter-term, experience- and skills-based goals of student researchers. As a result, she has been acting as project manager since 2016. While some of this work has been based around developing project plans and workflow, a significant element of it has been around team-building and collaboration. Cultivating this collaborative community is sometimes visible: we hold weekly drop-in meetings and contribute to a group chat, the transcripts of which testify to the amount of labour that goes into collecting data, and also to the sense of camaraderie that has developed among student researchers.

However, just as individual records in the database are only a partial representation of the work involved in collecting data, the meetings and group chat

transcripts barely scratch the surface of the work of building and maintaining a team. Training, for example, requires new research assistants to learn the definitions and standards for each field in a record, but it also involves ensuring that those research assistants feel comfortable with asking the inevitable questions that will arise as they begin working on the project independently. Because the work is so detail-oriented, research assistants must be sufficiently interested in the work they have been assigned. The vital role of these factors only becomes visible when it is not successful: a student researcher feels uncomfortable asking other team members for help or is too bored to focus, and so completes a number of records incorrectly. For example, a recent research assistant expressed an interest in nineteenth-century travel narratives; as a genre not well-accounted for by our data, it was fitting to assign her the task of adding and editing records of travel narratives that involved women in their production, starting with those included in the database, *British Travel Writing: Women's Travel Writing, 1780–1840* (Colbert 2019). Similarly, another research assistant's interest in children's writing meant that she was assigned the task of importing and cleaning data given to us by the Osborne Collection of Children's Literature at the University of Toronto. Assigning student researchers tasks that they find meaningful keeps them interested in the project; it also allows members of the project to develop more targeted areas of expertise, which in turn allows them to act as important resources for other members of the team, whose tasks may overlap with theirs. Thus, paying attention to their interests and experiences is a key strategy for making them feel like valued members of a research community, in which their contributions go well beyond data entry. Although at times the short-term needs of our research assistants, who are often undergraduate students looking for work experience that will help them in non-academic careers, may not seem to align with the long-term aims of the project, the affective labour of ensuring that they are comfortable with each other and completing tasks that they find meaningful means better work in the long run.

Acknowledging affective labour on Digital Humanities projects is thus twofold. It requires recognizing that the work of project management is, in some way, fundamentally affective, which, in turn, requires an awareness that even the

most basic tasks contain an emotional dimension. While it is vital to ensure that student researchers feel their work is valuable and interesting, it is important that their emotional investment in the project does not take the place of other kinds of compensation, in the forms of payment and credit for work completed. Through our work on this project, we have come to realise that the labour of the historical women whom we are recovering is not the only labour in danger of being rendered invisible. At times, our behind-the-scenes work of scanning through sources for dates, locations, and even names that don't seem to exist seems eerily similar to that of the women in the book trades of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in ways that have forced us to confront the possibility that in the process of recovering historical women, we are erasing ourselves. Moreover, like the women in the book trades whose work was obscured by their social and affective ties to firms owned by their husbands, brothers, and sons, student labourers on digital projects who care about their work run the risk of being overlooked or undercompensated. Part of the problem is that the emotional labour of managing and participating in a large-scale Digital Humanities project is not part of an established workflow that can be easily described in a document that outlines processes; instead, it is part of the ongoing interactions between members of a team that is in constant flux. While writing this article, at times we struggled to find the language to articulate the work that goes into fostering this kind of collaborative and community-based work, in large part because it has evaded inclusion in the data- and process-driven documentation that we have already produced. Finding ways, such as producing blog posts and writing this article, to document the emotional as well as the data-driven labour of major projects like the WPHP is integral to the work of feminist recovery and essential to the success of Digital Humanities as a collaborative and open discipline.

### **Competing interests**

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

### **Author contributions**

Authors are listed in alphabetical order. Contributions to this essay were split equally between the two authors.

## Editorial contributions

**Section Editor/Copy Editor:** Darcy Tamayose, The Journal Incubator, University of Lethbridge, Canada.

**Copy Editor/Bibliographies Manager:** Shahina Parvin, The Journal Incubator, University of Lethbridge, Canada.

## References

- Anderson, Katrina, Lindsey Bannister, Janey Dodd, Deanna Fong, Michelle Levy,** and **Lindsey Seatter.** 2016. "Student Labour and Training in Digital Humanities." *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 10(1). Accessed August 17, 2020. <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/10/1/000233/000233.html>.
- Barker, Hannah.** 1997. "Women, Work and the Industrial Revolution: Female Involvement in the English Printing Trades, c.1700–1840." In *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities*, edited by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, 81–100. Abingdon; New York: Routledge.
- Boyles, Christina, Anne Cong-Huyen, Carrie Johnston, Jim McGrath,** and **Amanda Phillips.** 2018. "Precarious Labor and the Digital Humanities." *American Quarterly* 70(3): 693–700. Accessed August 17, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2018.0054>
- Colbert, Benjamin.** 2014. *British Travel Writing: Women's Travel Writing, 1780–1840*. Designed by Movable Type Ltd. Accessed July 12, 2020. [www.wlv.ac.uk/btw](http://www.wlv.ac.uk/btw).
- Fitzpatrick, Barbara Laning.** 2004. "Rivington Family (per. c. 1710–c. 1960), Printers, Publishers, and Lawyers." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by David Cannadine. Oxford U.K: Oxford University. Accessed August 17, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/70881>
- Levy, Michelle,** and **Kandice Sharren.** (eds.) 2019. The Women's Print History Project, 1750–1830. Accessed August 17, 2020. <https://womensprinthistoryproject.com/>.
- Logsdon, Alexis, Amy Mars,** and **Heather Tompkins.** 2017. "Claiming Expertise from Betwixt and between: Digital Humanities Librarians, Emotional Labor,

and Genre Theory." *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 24(2–4): 155–70. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10691316.2017.1326862>

**Marsden, Jean I.** 2002. "Beyond Recovery: Feminism and the Future of Eighteenth-Century Literary Studies." *Feminist Studies* 28(3): 657–62. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178795>

**Shirazi, Roxanne.** 2016. "Conditions of (In)Visibility: Cultivating a Documentary Impulse in the Digital Humanities." *Presented at the Invisible Work in the Digital Humanities, Florida State University, Florida*. November 18. Accessed July 13, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28LlvujbrS8>.

# Response: Student Labour and Feminist Recovery in Large-Scale Research Projects

Claire Battershill

Simon Fraser University, CA

cbatters@sfu.ca

---

In her analysis of her role as a graduate student involved in an intergenerational, collaborative Digital Humanities (DH) project, Anna Mukamal draws attention to the relationship between feminist principles and the critical assessment of labour practices: “It is a critical commonplace,” she writes, “that the question of labour, particularly under-recognised labour, is always a feminist one” (9). A commonplace it may be, but the feminist act of analyzing the particularities of labour experiences bears repeating over and over, especially when institutional and social hierarchies remain robust. Accounts that draw attention to the implications of student labour act as important correctives to narratives of scholarly production that attribute research to a single author or Principle Investigator (PI) and fail to acknowledge individual contributions other than those of the named author or project director. Both essays in this section assess the roles of graduate students in DH projects and draw attention to sites of labour that might otherwise be obscured by the very modes of production and dissemination by which we still produce scholarly work.

In the above articles, Mukamal, Kate Moffatt, and Kandice Sharren add to the important ongoing conversation about labour practices in DH by offering reflections on their experiences in various kinds of roles as research assistants (RAs). While RA work undertaken by graduate students has been a mainstay of academic culture for a long time—and in that sense collaboration between students and faculty is so common as to be sometimes taken for granted—DH projects have tended to reframe and restructure student participation in ways that merit careful scrutiny. The goal of this work is often to render sometimes-obscured time and effort (including not

only digging in archives, but also the time-consuming affective labour of assembling and managing groups) more visible (a persistent theme of Moffatt and Sharren's contribution) and to ask and keep asking if we give all participants in the academic knowledge production process enough credit and/or compensation.

The DH projects in which the authors are involved—the *Modernist Archives Publishing Project* (MAPP) for Mukamal and the *Women's Print History Project* (WPHP) for Moffatt and Sharren—are similar, despite their focus on distinct historical periods, in that they both seek to provide a corrective to the male-dominated historical accounts of book and publishing histories. Both projects involve acts of feminist recovery in the field of book history. In many ways the projects are excellent complements to one another, and these two papers belong together in an organic way that makes them even more coherent as consecutive essays. The other resonance between them lies in the historical parallels that they draw between the subjects of their research and their own present-day experiences as workers. All of the authors in this section are working on materials relating to the history of female labour and as such they have a particular interest in and fascination with the dynamics of collaboration undertaken by female-gendered knowledge-producers in the present.

Mukamal offers the view of a relatively junior graduate student in a project management role. In the interests of full disclosure, I should note that I am a founding member and co-director of the team Mukamal manages and have been directly involved in mentoring and supervising her. I am at liberty, then, to comment further on the specific challenges she has faced in her important role working for MAPP. We have more materials to grapple with than we ever possibly could manage in a comprehensive bibliography (documents number in the hundreds of thousands) and the sheer volume of materials (both archival and born-digital) that she contends with is enormous, various, and messy. This vastness—combined with a radically distributed PI-model in which five equal co-PIs collectively direct the project—makes for a specific and somewhat uniquely challenging circumstance for a graduate student RA. One of Mukamal's contributions is to position her work as cutting-edge and revisionist but at the same time deeply connected to the history of the discipline,



thinking “with, but also beyond dominant disciplinary practices such as close reading and historicist modes of analysis” (4). Her synthesis of these ideas not only in this piece but also for the operational procedures of MAPP more broadly has contributed on a fundamental level to the structure of the project. We have, in the most basic practical sense but also on a conceptual level, revisited the student roles on our project and redefined them based on Mukamal’s experience and on her theorization of student labour. Needless to say, this is an outstanding contribution for a graduate student to make to a large-scale project.

While Mukamal’s piece addresses the shifting and multivalent responsibilities of adding vast quantities of material to a resource and managing a widely dispersed team, Moffatt and Sharren focus on the significant labour that sometimes goes into finding nothing. This is an underrepresented and undernarrated aspect of research more broadly; in the field of biomedicine a solution was devised in 2002 in the form of the *Journal of Negative Results*. The journal’s goal was to promote the dissemination of null or negative results in order to reduce research bias, but it also has the effect of documenting labour that might otherwise have gone unreported. The journal closed in 2017, reflecting a large-scale change in scientific research practices: other journals in biomedicine are now habitually publishing negative results. This example indicates that mechanisms for documenting what Moffatt and Sharren eloquently describe as “the work that goes into *not* finding” are clearly alterable in the academy, and sharing language to describe fruitless searches (“attempted verification” in the terms of the WPHP) is an important contribution.

So how do we make DH projects like these not only acts of historical recovery but also feminist practices, as Mukamal suggests? These essays and the projects they draw from provide a necessary corrective to the patriarchal narratives that have eclipsed female participation in publishing and book industries. But the question that remains from a project-director perspective is: how do we honour and respect student experiences without creating even more underrecognized work for them? The challenge is to maintain the positive affective outcomes of collaboration (friendship, shared work, and good company), but ensure that these benefits don’t obscure additional labour or create conditions for undercompensated student

overwork that arises out of passion or love for a subject and for a team. Taken together, these papers suggest a hopeful way forward for ethical collaboration with students. Mukamal articulates the important pedagogical lessons of collaboration: “facility with contingency and process, an openness to surprise, and a commitment to building connections” (7). Moffatt and Sharren add that even projects that provide enriching experiences for students need to continually reaffirm commitments to principles of justice and generosity.


### Competing interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

**How to cite this article:** Mukamal, Anna, Kate Moffatt, Kandice Sharren, and Claire Battershill. 2021. “Student Labour and Major Research Projects.” *Digital Studies/Le champ numérique* 11(1): 2, pp. 1–33. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/dscn.375>

**Submitted:** 17 January 2020 **Accepted:** 02 March 2020 **Published:** 16 April 2021

**Copyright:** © 2021 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

 *Digital Studies/Le champ numérique* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities. **OPEN ACCESS** 