

## Tenure, Promotion and Digital Publication

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### Abstract

This is a discussion of the impact of *Digital Humanities Quarterly's* launch on humanities scholarship.

The launching of an online journal like *Digital Humanities Quarterly* represents much that is positive about the current status of our community and much that still must be accomplished. It is satisfying to see a totally online scholarly publication, especially one that seeks to fill the niche created 40 years ago by *Computers and the Humanities*, a repository for information on the evolving relationship between humanistic endeavors and computer technology. That the technology this new journal employs is also the one that it studies can be counted as a step forward. At the same time, however, the absence of parallel publications in other sectors of humanities research is a measure of the distance still to be traveled before computer publishing is regarded as fully equal to the book and the print journal. 1

Underlying the status of online publication as an inferior medium is probably the concern on the part of potential contributors that appearance in electronic media is not as highly regarded by the gatekeepers of tenure and promotion as the traditional hard-bound book and the article offprint, at least in the humanities. In the survey of attitudes among chairs and deans of all academic disciplines I organized in 1980, long before even the Internet had developed, much less the World Wide Web and the widespread availability of personal computers and laptops, the opinion of only half the respondents was in favor of treating online publication, even with all the traditional safeguards of peer review and editorial control, as earning the same credit toward tenure and promotion as was provided by traditional publication. How much the balance has tilted in favor of the newer technology has not (to my knowledge) been measured recently. A study of language departments conducted by the Modern Language Association is mentioned below. 2

This reluctance to provide wider and less costly access to humanities scholarship represents a disjuncture with the expectations of the potential audience for this information. The generation of students in our graduate schools today has already become completely at ease with computers and online communication. Even in their non-academic activities, these students rely increasingly on computers for access to information of almost every sort. In their academic activities they download electronic information to such an extent that their instructors must plead for at least the partial use of print media. Now, with the drive promoted by Google to scan the contents of several major university and public libraries, the time is drawing close when very few reasons will remain to argue the superiority of books and print journals over online databases. Thus the arguments for directing publishing scholars toward the devious route of publishing new material in print, only to have it then scanned for online access become increasingly illogical. 3

The time it will take for the academic establishment to recognize the value of online publication is a function of its willingness to accept the replacement of a system that has seemed to operate relatively well until now. Books and print articles have been the stairs leading to the tenure, promotion, higher salaries and reduced teaching loads that are the system's rewards for scholarly industry. When deans and even chairs are incapable of evaluating the content of such publications, they have been able to rely on the number of a candidate's publications, their substance, the prestige of their publishers and (to a limited extent in the humanities) the number of times they are cited elsewhere. 4

With understandable ergophobia, these administrators do not eagerly anticipate learning a new system without these 5

comforting means of measuring accomplishment. The latest newsletter of the Modern Language Association announces that “40.8% of departments in doctorate-granting institutions report no experience in evaluating refereed articles in electronic format, and 65.7% report no experience in evaluating monographs in electronic format.” How daring must a pioneering candidate for tenure and/or promotion be to risk career advancement in this dangerous environment?

*Digital Humanities Quarterly* therefore strikes out a new path for humanities scholarship. The journal’s long-term success may well establish a pattern followed by humanities journals devoted to topics other than the application of the technology. If so, future issues may need to consider the consequences of that wider adoption of this publication mode. And future articles in this space can consider the implications of our impact on the evolution of academe.



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