Working with text in a digital age

An NEH Institute for Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities
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A call for applications will follow.

This Institute will focus on linguistic sources that shed light upon the human record. While collections in Greek, Latin, Arabic, German, and English will be prominent, participants with many different linguistic interests are encouraged to apply. This institute introduces students of the humanities with established digital humanities technologies such as TEI XML markup as well as new methods from fields such as corpus and computational linguistics, information retrieval and data visualization. It provides participants with three weeks not only to acquire new skills but also to transform the way in which they conceive of their research and teaching. We particularly encourage graduate students and library professionals as well as faculty to apply as individuals or as small groups or as representatives of established collaborations.

While the Institute will provide extensive training in advanced technologies, such technologies are presented as a means to advance the larger goals of the humanities. These goals include not only the transformation of research in the humanities but expanding the impact of humanities research within and beyond the academy. Instruction will include case studies where advanced technology has not only transformed research agendas but, for example, 1) enabled significant contributions and meaningful research by undergraduates, 2) stimulated new collaborations with colleagues long-separated by barriers of space, language, and/or culture, and 3) offered the general public access to, and participation in, scholarly interpretation of the past. We particularly encourage applications that explain how they wish to use their experience at the Institute to advance one or more of these goals in their own work.

The institute will begin with a week of formal training that will include both presentations and hands on exploration providing participants with a shared set of methods. Topics include an introduction to TEI XML and to corpus and computational linguistics, with an emphasis on applied structural markup and standoff linguistic annotation; exercises in representing written sources in digital form; morpho-syntactic analysis and markup, discourse structures and other categories of linguistic annotation; named entities, textual quotation, paraphrase, allusion, citations; the reinvention of existing reference works (such as lexica, grammars, and editions) and the rise of born-digital knowledge bases (such as treebanks).

Participants will be able to spend the bulk of the Institute using what they learned to develop their own projects, working wherever possible in small groups and comparing their efforts. Additional lecturers will join the Institute in weeks two and three, offering new perspectives for the group as a whole and advising on specific projects for which they have useful expertise. To reinforce the theme of reaching beyond individual sub-disciplines and beyond the humanities, during the final week of the participants will present each other's work to the group as a whole.

We have allocated 5% of the overall budget to provide support for an open conference in the summer 2013. The development of this conference will provide one theme for this Institute, as participants develop more experience and can use their diverse backgrounds to broaden our understanding of how we can transform our use of textual and linguistic sources and the role that those sources play in the intellectual life of society. An open call for papers for the 2013 conference will provide both an opportunity and a challenge for members of the 2012 Institute. 2012 participants will have a chance to partake in developing this conference but their submissions will compete on an even basis in an open call for inclusion in the 2013 program.

Short summary:

This institute will provide participants with three weeks in which (1) to develop hands on experience with TEI-XML, (2) to apply methods from information retrieval, text visualization, and corpus and computational linguistics to the analysis of textual and linguistic sources in the humanities, (3) to rethink not only their own research agendas but also new relationships between their work and non-specialists (e.g., an expansion in opportunities for tangible contributions and significant research by undergraduates, new collaborations that transcend boundaries of language and culture, and increased opportunities for the general public both to access and contribute to our understanding of the past). A two-day conference on the theme of the Institute in the summer of 2013 with an open call for contributions, will provide both a venue for, and a challenge to, participants in the 2012 Institute.