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DASH Swedish National Doctoral School in Digital Humanities: Educational Strategies in DH Doctoral Training

The application of digital skills in research is becoming increasingly important for scholars in humanities and social sciences, who often encounter it out of necessity and develop their skills “on the go” (Poremski 2017). While digital literacy is widespread today, it is also important not to assume all participants in courses concerning digital humanities tools and methods have digital expertise, and to explore effective strategies for skills development and training. Instructors may instead aim to guide students and participants through an inquiry or problem, and aim for applicability to a wide range of potential future research. Graduate and professional research training in digital humanities is therefore necessarily practical and experience-based, without assuming high technical proficiency. Active learning methods in particular have been previously advised for teaching digital humanities—though primarily at the undergraduate level—due to its interdisciplinary, reflective, and collaborative nature, including scaffolding and process-based pedagogies (e.g. Battershill & Ross 2017; Warren 2016; Cordell 2016; Locke 2017, Hirsch 2012; Tracy & Hoiem 2018). Their implementation for graduate and researcher development is, however, not widely addressed. Given the differences between research and undergraduate education regarding e.g. participant diversity, interdisciplinary focus, time, and digital literacy, it is valuable for institutions which offer such training to examine different models for how these strategies can be implemented effectively.

This presentation discusses the educational strategies and organizational framework in conducting the Swedish National Doctoral School in Digital Humanities: Data, Culture, and Society – Critical Perspectives (DASH). As the first national doctoral school in digital humanities in Sweden, DASH (funded by the Swedish National Research Council 2023-2027) provides a comprehensive digital humanities curriculum to doctoral candidates in humanities and social sciences, establishing itself as a key element in the growth of European national humanities infrastructures. DASH employs active, experiential learning methods in curriculum development, emphasizing process-based pedagogies for graduate and professional training in digital humanities. Ten doctoral students are accepted each year from running doctoral programs at Swedish institutions, and provided with access to courses, seminars, scholarly and technical resources, and specialized workshops within a 2-year period of their acceptance into the doctoral school.

The DASH doctoral school is organized as a collaboration among four major Swedish universities—Umeå University, Gothenburg University, Linnaeus University, and coordinated by Uppsala University—bringing together four diverse research centers in digital humanities. DASH is also part of the Swedish National Infrastructure in Digital Humanities (HUMINFRA), ensuring a broad network of participation and resource access. This unique structure enhances the national humanities research infrastructures in Sweden and offers an inclusive educational experience integrating both theoretical and practical learning. The program integrates research and teaching through a unique experiential learning focus, supported by a ‘socio-technical’ resource structure. DASH notably offers doctoral students the support of dedicated research engineers—data scientists with experience working on digital humanities research projects—as well as active research professionals in digital humanities. This fosters interdisciplinary collaboration and enhances the perspectives doctoral students are exposed to in workshops, courses, and seminars.

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The adoption of an experiential and active guided inquiry approach aims to address the challenge of supporting individuals with diverse academic and technical backgrounds. This pedagogical strategy is key for fostering an inclusive and engaging learning environment, effectively tackling the challenges inherent in a national and multidisciplinary educational model, where the aim is to provide PhD candidates in humanities and social sciences knowledge skills and critical perspectives, in addition to digital methods and tools for research. DASH's course offerings include a combination of theoretical and technical coursework which is complemented by the Summer School in tools in methods. Courses such as "Cultural Analytics", "Tools and Methods", "Critical Theory and Digital Transformation" and "Ethics, Politics, and Policies in Digital Humanities," represent the embodiment of this approach. These courses are designed and tailored for doctoral education, combining critical theory with hands-on application of digital technology. In line with the curriculum development strategies to encourage growth and applicability, these courses blend critical theory with applied digital technology, providing a comprehensive learning experience.

DASH also places a strong emphasis on fostering and bolstering networks among early career scholars, recognizing the pivotal role that collaboration and knowledge exchange play in academic growth. It features a rotation of courses which are hosted at partner universities that are strategically designed to address specific domains of expertise while catering to the diverse research interests of participants, thereby creating a forum for scholarly exchange. Through these courses, doctoral candidates have the opportunity to engage with peers and mentors from various backgrounds, broadening their horizons and nurturing cross-disciplinary collaboration. This rich ecosystem not only enhances individual learning but also contributes to the collective advancement of knowledge within digital humanities. DASH's commitment to diversity and geographic inclusivity is extended to doctoral students ranging from across Sweden, inviting them to access resources and perspectives which may not be otherwise present at their home institutions. After an initial introductory 2-day workshop in person, courses and seminars are primarily offered online or blended. Students are then funded to join in-person advanced workshops and the DASH Summer School on tools and methods in Zadar, Croatia. DASH facilitates access and use of the resources in the national infrastructures in the humanities but also emerges as an element in the infrastructure by providing new resources and competences. This geographical inclusiveness not only enriches the overall learning experience but also serves as a testament to DASH's capacity to provide education and resources to individuals scattered across diverse locations.

The diverse backgrounds and perspectives that emerge from this wide geographic reach foster a dynamic exchange of ideas and insights. Moreover, it underscores DASH's adaptability and resilience in delivering high-quality education to students regardless of their geographical constraints. The program's inclusive ethos facilitates a melting pot of ideas and cultural influences, contributing to a more holistic and well-rounded education in digital humanities. DASH's commitment to innovative teaching and learning is exemplified by its adoption of an experiential and active guided inquiry approach, which caters to individuals with diverse academic and technical backgrounds.

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