

Developing a Community of Practice: The CHASE Model for Digital Humanities Researcher Training

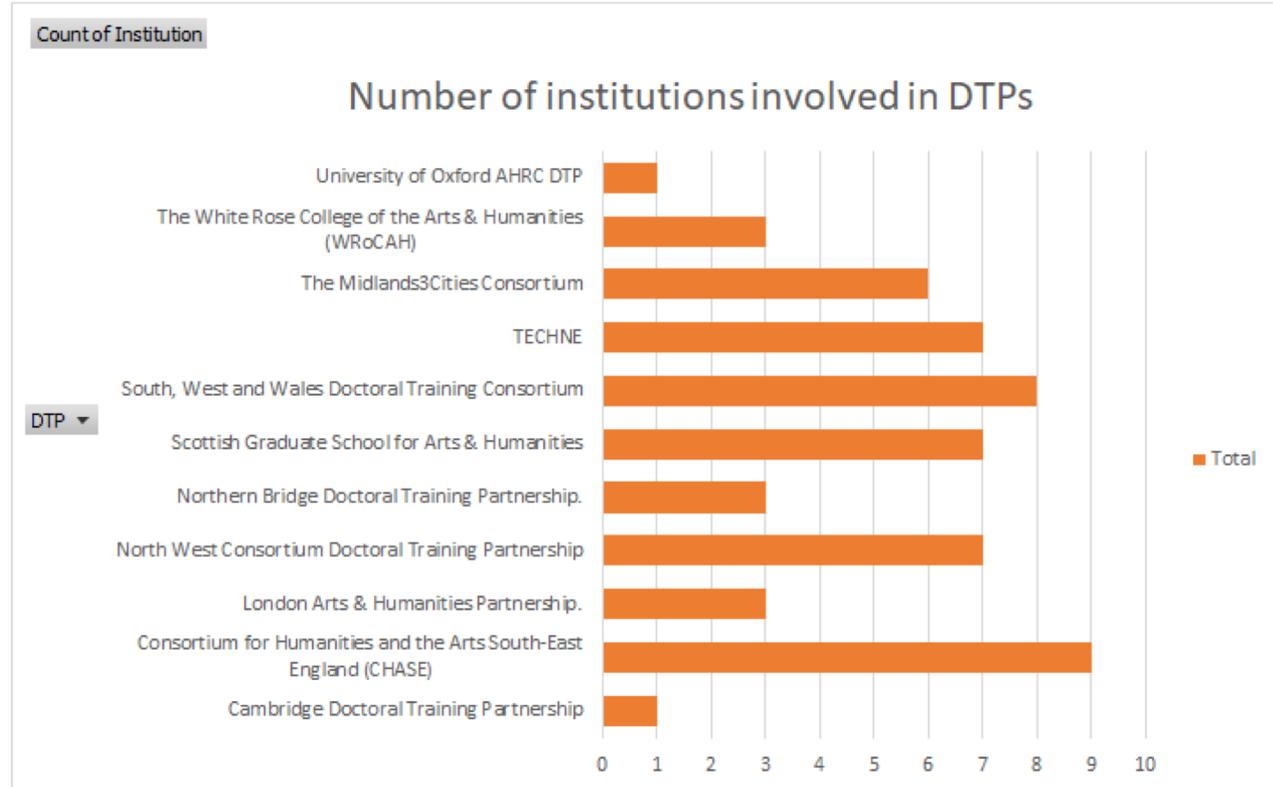
Francesca Benatti (Open University)

Paul Gooding (University of Glasgow)

Matthew Sillence (University of East Anglia)

DTPs and PhD funding in UK

- AHRC funds 11 Doctoral Training Partnerships in the UK
- 55 institutions involved
- DTPs responsible for doctoral training and supervision



What is CHASE AHDA?

- CHASE = Consortium of the Humanities and Arts South-East England; 9 univs.
- **75** studentships available/yr x 5 (2014-2019); **373** students
- Cohort **training funds**
- AHDA = Arts and Humanities in the Digital Age training programme; **2014/15-present**

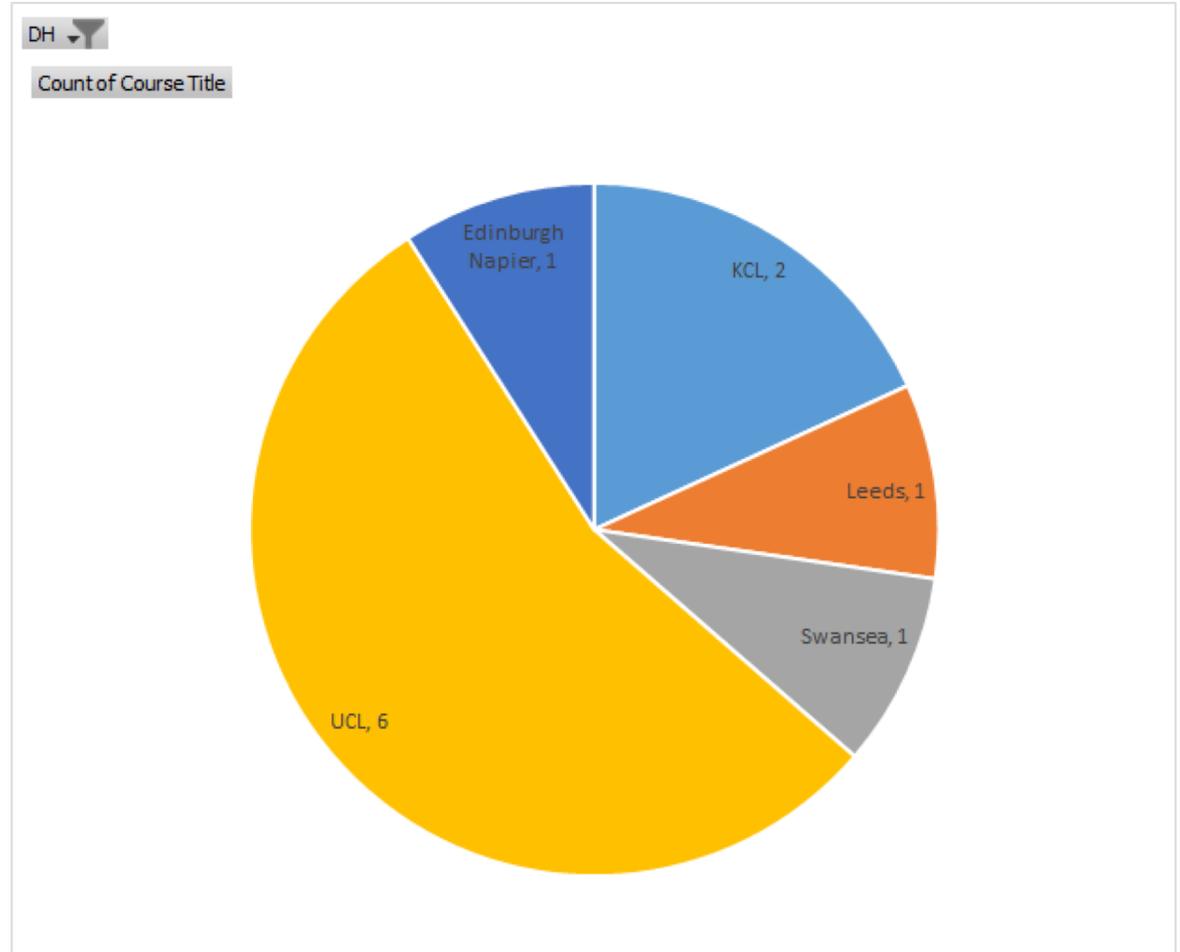


DH in the UK

- Training is still **unevenly distributed** across universities
- Number of DH MAs: FindaMasters.com - 11/350 Masters programmes could be defined as DH, but limited (data collected 2019-06-13); other Masters programmes are available (e.g. Lancaster or programmes listed at EADH)
- Number of DH PhD programmes: 1/20 PhD programmes advertised that mention “Digital” and “Humanities” (2019-06-25)
- Difficult to quantify precisely due to conflicting definitions of DH

Masters Programmes

- Majority of the 11 DH MAs are in **London-based** universities (8/11).
- 4/11 UK DTPs represented.
- **None** are in the **CHASE DTP**.



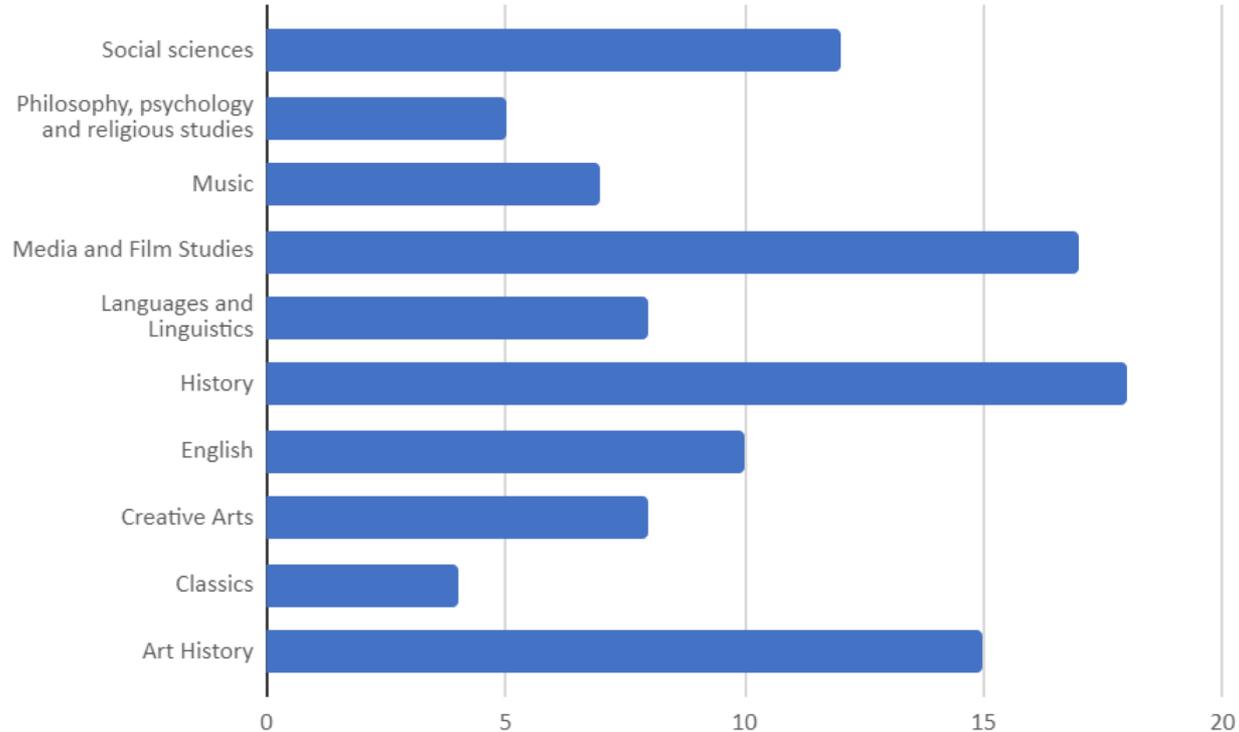
Engagement with DH in CHASE universities

- **Small** DH presence in CHASE at the moment
- **Sussex** Humanities Lab
- **DH-specific staff:** OU, UEA, Essex, Kent
- Growing presence of DH (**driven by staff research interests**):
Birkbeck, Goldsmiths, SOAS, Courtauld
- How do we draw together such **varying levels of experience**
into a coherent training programme?

CHASE student body

- **Varieties** of student backgrounds
- E.g. digital humanities, musicology, practical digital arts, social sciences, literature, art history, history, visual arts/visual anthropology, media studies
- How can we make the programme broadly **relevant** to such a diverse student body?

CHASE AHDA Students by Discipline



Rationale for Pedagogical Approach

- Two key **challenges** in developing the course:
 - diverse range of institutions with broad remits across arts and humanities
 - disciplinary backgrounds of self-selecting cohort unknown until sign up
- **3 types** of AHDA **students** with different motivations:
 - Filling a skills gap or “tactical” DH
 - Legitimate peripheral participation
 - Involvement in DH community of practice

Pedagogical Approach

- **Iterative** approach to programme development:
 - Focus on DH as a **reflective methodological space**.
 - **Self-deterministic** element foregrounding individual skills development.
- **Interdisciplinarity** as a key component of DH as both
 - “**Communities of practice**” (Siemens 2016) of DH into a “methodological commons” (McCarty and Short 2002)
 - “**Trading zones**” (Svensson 2012): different traditions maintained while still carrying out intersectional work

How Programme Structure Reflects Pedagogy

- Our approach has therefore been threefold:
 - To establish a series of workshops on **key methods** in DH
 - To support this work with a **residential school** that introduces a degree of **meta-discussion** (Cordell 2016) plus an explicit **self-reflective component** framed in terms of threshold concepts.
 - To develop understanding through **group work** that requires students to work **collaboratively**.

2015-18 iterations

- Introduction to Digital Humanities (3 days)
 - Digitisation and metadata
 - Project planning
 - Conceptual thresholds
- Web Authoring (2 days)
- One-day workshops (choose at least 2):
 - Digital Texts
 - Digital Images
 - Databases
 - Information Visualisation
- Project Presentations

Challenges of project

- **Compulsory** collaboration in 2015-2018, refined iteratively
- Student feedback highlighted problems with:
 - **Time** commitment
 - **Relevance** of the type of project to student's own research
 - Challenges in **group dynamics** and follow-through
- Group projects or individual projects?

AHDA 2019

- Importance of time commitment: all workshops **compulsory**
- **10 days** in total spread over **4 months**
- **Project-oriented** approach, taking students step-by-step through **lifecycle of a DH project**
- **Individual** projects to:
 - give students incentive to invest time in the programme
 - benefit professional development (thesis chapters, conferences, publications)

Academic socialisation

- **Feedforward** approach at mid-project review - students provided anonymous comments and suggestions for each student presenter in online real-time form
- Modelling **scholarly communication** and **peer review**
- Spontaneous **peer-to-peer support** and sharing of resources both inside and outside of classroom
- Reinforcing **self-reflective** model of development

2019 feedback data

Workshop	Score out of 5 (Likert Scale)
Winter School	4.26
Data Preparation	4.30
Mid-Project Review	3.53
Python	3.59
Information Visualisation	4.19
Network Analysis	3.15

Embedding academic literacies in the model?

- **“Academic literacies”** (Lea and Street 1998) - more critical approach to enable understanding of social nature of knowledge production
- Not explicitly embedded in the AHDA. Required by DH training?
- How does it speak to the three different types of learner?
 - a. Filling a skills gap or “tactical” DH
 - b. Legitimate peripheral participation
 - c. Involvement in DH community of practice

Conclusions

AHDA successfully addressed requirements of the 3 types of learner to an extent:

- Addressing skills gap
 - Focusing on **data and project management**
 - Addressing **multidisciplinary** methods and practices.
 - Recognising **legitimate peripheral participation** as mode of engagement with Digital Humanities.
- Facilitating Academic socialisation
 - **Peer learning.**
 - Modelling **academic communications.**

Next steps

- Further work required to **embed academic literacies** within the programme for those who want **deeper engagement** with DH Community of Practice
- Decisions for future programmes:
 - **Scalability vs depth of engagement?**

Thank you for listening!

Contact details:

Francesca Benatti: francesca.benatti@open.ac.uk @DH_OU
@rhymesontheroad

Paul Gooding: paul.gooding@glasgow.ac.uk @pmgooding

Matthew Sillence: m.sillence@uea.ac.uk @MSill1

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