



Digital Humanities Center Community Conversations

Executive Summary

The SJSU Library and San José Public Library conducted focus groups and cognitive mapping exercises to gather insights into user needs and aspirations for the King Library’s Digital Humanities Center (DH Center). This report focuses on SJSU community feedback and recommends several short- and medium-term goals for the Center's development before its formal opening.

Key Findings and Recommendations:

1. Programming Models and User Expectations: Participants envisioned various programming models for the DH Center, such as:

- **Third Space:** A cozy, lounge-like area for study and socializing.
- **Exhibition Space:** Showcasing art, digital projects, and interactive displays.
- **Event Space:** Hosting performances, lectures, and public events.
- **Collaborative Hub:** Facilitating project collaboration and workshops.
- **Educational Enrichment:** Offering hands-on learning and K-12 programming.
- **Creation Space:** Providing a workspace for individual and group projects.
- **Informational Space:** Serving as a welcome and information center.
- **Project Enabler:** Offering consultation and technical support for projects.

2. Core Services: Five foundational services emerged as critical to meet user expectations:

- Events
- Exhibitions
- Project collaboration and consultation
- Workshops

- Workspace

3. Thematic Programming and Strategic Ideas: Participants suggested adopting semester or annual themes to organize programming and facilitate collaboration. Other strategic ideas included tying programming to educational outcomes and establishing a vision or mission statement.

4. Challenges and Concerns: Several challenges were identified, including the need to clarify the concept of digital humanities and addressing sound and distraction issues due to the Center's open layout within the library.

5. Recommendations:

- **Prioritize Core Functions:** Focus on implementing the five foundational services in the first academic year to establish a strong foundation.
- **Effective Naming and Branding:** Develop a name and brand that communicates the Center's values of inclusivity, exploration, innovation, and creativity.
- **Themed Programming:** Initiate themed programming to organize activities and attract diverse groups.
- **Create Opportunities for Fellows and Affiliates:** Establish formal associations for students, faculty, staff, and community members to expand the Center's programming capacity.
- **Interactive Elements:** Incorporate interactive exhibits that engage visitors while addressing noise concerns.

By following these recommendations, the King Library's Digital Humanities Center can effectively meet the diverse needs of its users and establish itself as a vibrant, inclusive space for innovation and collaboration.

Community Conversations Process

We used two approaches to gain community feedback from students, faculty, and staff: focus group sessions and a cognitive mapping activity.

Focus Group Sessions

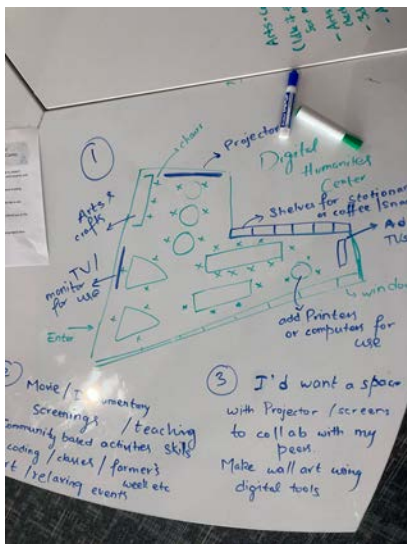
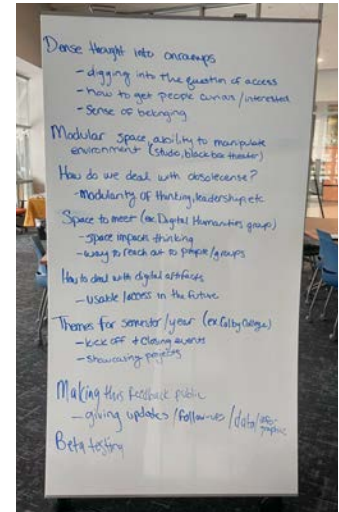
We held five 90-minute focus group sessions within the DH Center for various campus groups; three sessions were held for SJSU faculty and staff, one session was held for SJSU Library

employees, and one session was held for students enrolled in a digital humanities class. Each session consisted of 4-10 participants. Participants represented a broad range of stakeholders at SJSU, including faculty and chairs from various colleges, affinity center directors, athletics and counseling employees, development directors, and technical staff.

In these sessions, we guided participants through a group brainstorming exercise and an individual reflection (charrette) activity in order to collect both general and specific thoughts and ideas around the center.

For the brainstorming exercise, participants worked together in groups of 4-5 to respond to broad prompts around how they envisioned the center supporting SJSU students, SJSU faculty and staff, and the local San José community. We then had all groups come together to share the thoughts and ideas they produced.

The charrette activity consisted of individual written or sketched responses to focused prompts around digital humanities such as current projects participants may be working on or would like to do, the core concepts and concerns they might have around digital humanities, and how they envision the physical space.



Cognitive mapping activity

Gathering feedback from students required a different approach, as the longer format of the community conversations proved to be a poor fit with demanding student schedules. Instead, we held two 90-minute tabling sessions in the DH Center where we invited students to come into the space and complete a 15-minute cognitive mapping exercise.

Students were asked to draw or write out their thoughts to 3 prompts around the DH Center, and then share a brief overview of what they drew or wrote after they had

finished. The 3 prompts included drawing the physical space as they would like to use it, events that would attract them to the space, and a project they would make using digital tools. At least 40 students participated in total.

Programming models

When imagining the activities, services, and affordances they would like to see in the DH Center, participants envisioned a broad range of possibilities. These **programming models** may be a helpful way to frame discussions around the goals and activities of the DH Center. We can then map specific service and staffing ideas to these models to see how they might fit together. For each programming model, we list one or more activities that participants seemed to expect would occur in the space.

It is important to note that when discussing programming in this report, we use the word “programming” as it would be used in an architectural or facilities context. The programming of the space encompasses all of the ways that the space is used by its occupants. While this may include events or other public “programs,” in our context, programming encompasses everything that happens in the physical space.

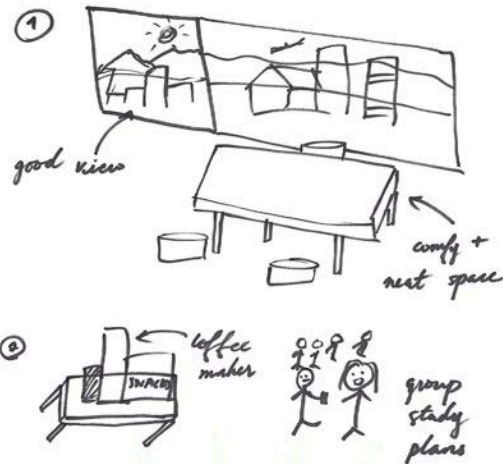
Third space

A cozy, welcoming space offering comfortable seating and snacks. This profile was particularly present in the cognitive mapping responses provided by SJSU students.

Model: Cafe, lounge

Expected activities:

Workspace - Space for group and individual study



Exhibition space

A space to display art, artifacts, and digital projects.

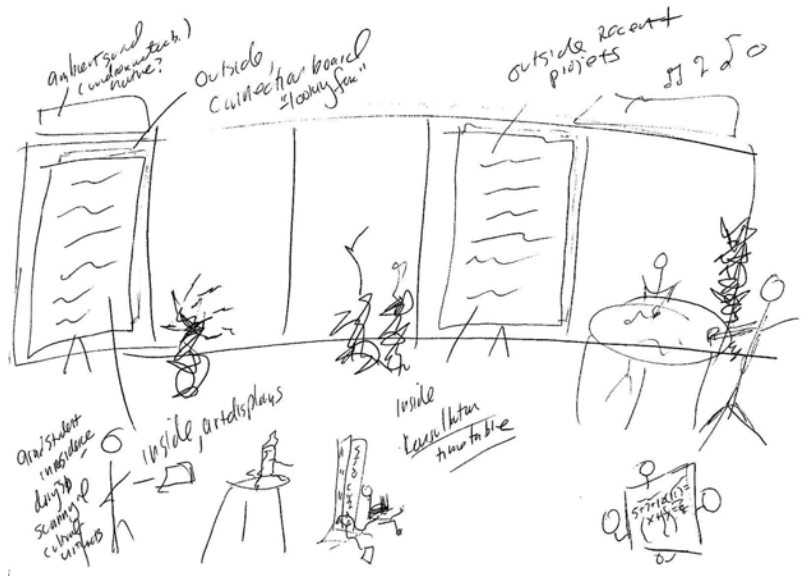
Models: Art gallery, art museum

Expected activities:

Exhibitions - digital art, library collections, digital projects and interactive displays

Hands-on introduction -

Interactive activities that orient visitors to the center

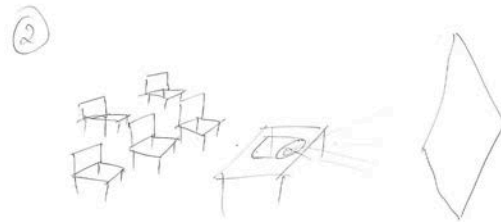


Event space



A space for performances, lectures, and other public events.

Models: Black box theater, lecture hall



- games
- movie night
- presentations

Expected activities:

Events - Performances, lectures, concerts, conferences, and more

Institutional and community collaborator

An organizational entity that facilitates collaboration and connection.

Models: Academic center, granting/funding agency

Expected activities:

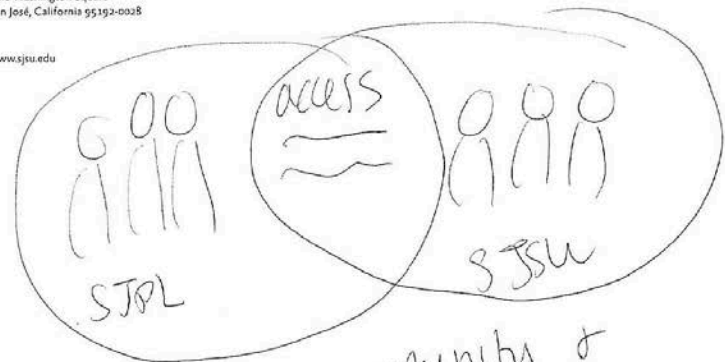
Events - Performances, lectures, concerts, conferences, and more

Workshops - hands-on learning for a variety of audiences

Exhibitions - digital art, library collections, digital projects and interactive displays

One Washington Square
San José, California 95192-0028

www.sjsu.edu



Equal opportunity & collaboration

Educational enrichment space

A destination for specific educational experiences.

Models: Science museum, cultural site

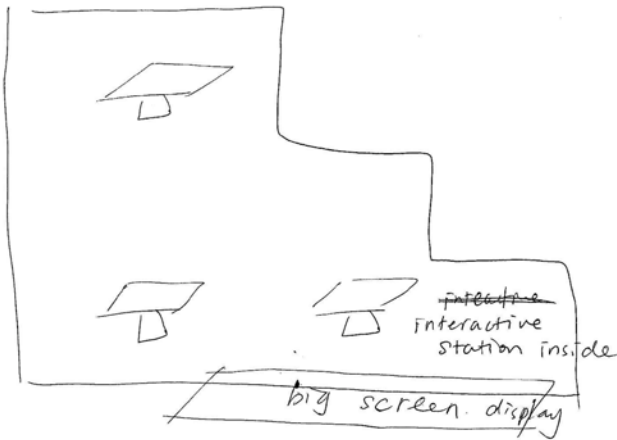
Expected activities:

Workshops - hands-on learning for a variety of audiences

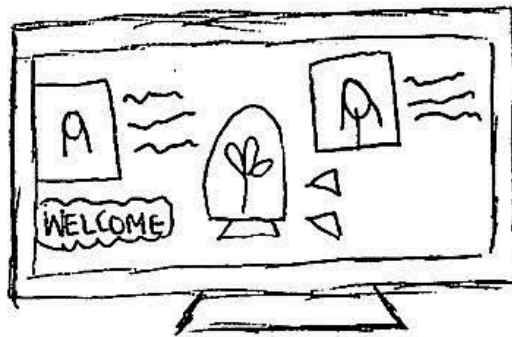
School group visits - Establish programming suitable for K-12 field trips

Hands-on introduction - Interactive activities that orient visitors to the center

Workspace - Space for group and individual study

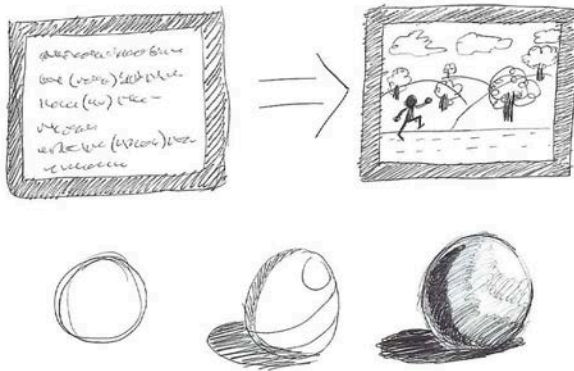


PROMPT #2



virtual/interactive
fieldtrips for places
out of state / out of
the country

Creation space



A space to work on projects,
whether alone or in collaboration.
Models: Art studio, laboratory

Expected activities:

Workshops - hands-on learning for a variety of audiences

Project consultation and collaboration -
Center affiliates available for advice and participation on digital projects

Workspace - Space for group and individual study



Informational space



A welcome center for the King Library and/or the city, providing information on what the rest of the building contains, or directing users to relevant resources throughout San José.

Models: Welcome center, library reference desk

Expected activities:

Hands-on introduction - Interactive activities that orient visitors to the center

Project enabler



A resource for consultation and technical support for projects. Collaborator on digital humanities projects.

Model: Consulting firm, design firm

Expected activities:

Workshops - hands-on learning for a variety of audiences

Project consultation and collaboration - Center affiliates available for advice and participation on digital projects



A broad scope brings opportunities and challenges

This wide range of possible models reflects the diversity of the conversation participants, as well as the open-ended prompts participants reviewed. Many participants commented that they were not sure of the center's profile, and encouraged the partners to define the scope of the center in order to make its goals legible to potential users and collaborators.

Strategic ideas

Given the challenge of balancing the ambitious goals and diverse expectations of stakeholders within the SJSU and San Jose communities, the team may benefit from identifying strategies for creating a coherent program that satisfies several of the possible models. The following ideas were suggested by participants and speak to strategic aspects of the center's development.

Themed programming

Participants suggested that the center establish semester or annual themes around which to build programming. This could facilitate collaboration with community and campus groups.

Tie programming to SJSU General Education learning outcomes

Participants suggested tying workshops or other programming to specific learning outcomes so that instructors could easily incorporate them into curricula.

Digital Humanities Open Mic

An open forum for presenting projects and work.

Project Job Board

A (digital) bulletin board for sharing opportunities and building project teams.

School group visits

Establish programming suitable for K-12 field trips or similar group visits.

Hands-on introduction

Create interactive activities that introduce visitors to the possibilities of the DH Center and orient them to the center.

Educational enrichment space, exhibition space

Mission or vision statement

SJSU faculty and staff in particular advocated for the center's partners to draft a mission or vision statement in order to clarify the center's goals and ambitions.

Modular leadership

While governance of the center was not a dominant topic in the conversations, one idea that was suggested was a rotating or "modular" leadership structure that would allow for new ideas and changes of direction as the center evolves.

DH Center Fellows/Affiliates

There was enthusiasm for various forms of fellowships or other temporary affiliations that community practitioners, SJSU faculty, students, staff, or others, might have with the center.

Thematic ideas

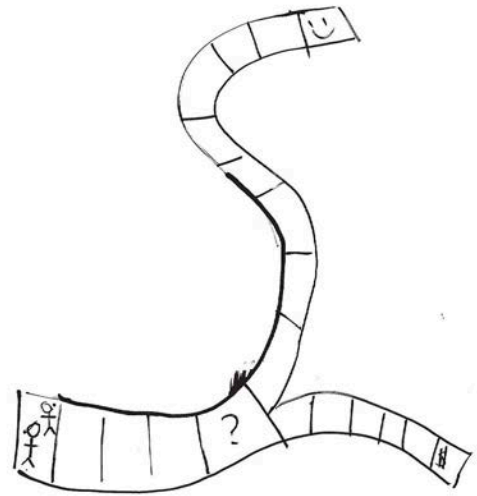
These are themes that recurred in the input of participants.

- Diversity, inclusion, belonging
- Ethics, values, critical intervention
- Career readiness, technical skills, industry collaboration
- The interface of physical and digital spaces
- Local history, San José
- Digital art
- Genealogy, family and personal history
- Gaming
- Wellness
- On-ramps to digital work

Thematic Tensions

Several themes seemed to emerge in pairs, highlighted by participants as tensions that might present opportunities for meaningful exploration and dialogue.

- Technology as industry / technology as a site of ethical exploration
- Specificity and academic investigation / approachability and inclusion
- Shared identity and experience / individual expression
- Embodied experience / screen time
- Rest and recovery / activity and ambition



Challenges, Concerns, and Observations

Participants surfaced several challenges and concerns during the conversations. In addition, spending time in the space revealed a few shared observations about the space.

Legibility

Participants expressed repeatedly that the concept of digital humanities was an obstacle to communicating about, understanding, and embracing the center. Community conversations included a brief introduction to digital humanities intended for a broad, general audience, but it became clear through the sessions that both “humanities” and “digital humanities” were concepts that will require repeated introduction and clarification for nearly all of the center’s intended constituencies.

Sound and distraction

The DH Center is acoustically open to the rest of the library’s first floor, and the noise level rises throughout the day along with the flow of visitors. Additionally, dancers use the space in front of the center during the late afternoon and early evening. Along with other factors, the

surrounding environment should be a consideration in identifying the most effective programming for the space.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Community Conversations participants understood and reflected back to us that the King Library's Digital Humanities Center is a complex project, and one that combines elements of many more familiar types of spaces and services. Participants were energized by the many possible uses of the space and its flexible and modular design.

Nevertheless, the challenge of communicating the mission of the space to its broad array of potential users was a dominant theme in the discussion. Two key recommendations address this challenge.

Recommendation #1 - Prioritize expected functions on opening but be prepared to evolve

Participants highlighted five highly expected activities for the center:

1. Events
2. Exhibitions
3. Project collaboration and consultation
4. Workshops
5. Workspace

The center should focus on implementing each of these elements in the 2024-25 academic year. If the center builds the capacity to do all of this in the first year, that would establish a strong foundation on which to build in the following years. Some of the additional project ideas highlighted in this report may be best considered as goals for subsequent years.

Recommendation #2 - Naming and branding that communicates the center's values

We recommend adopting a branded name for the center with a focus on communicating the values participants associated with their visions for the space. The name should communicate that the center is welcoming and inclusive and that it is a space for exploration, innovation, and

creativity. An ideation process around naming and branding is underway, and the planning team hopes to work with stakeholders to select a final name for the launch of the center.

Recommendation #3 - Themed programming

Initiate themed programming, with a new theme chosen each semester or season. Themes may resonate with programming themes in the College of Humanities and the Arts, or on campus more generally.

Themed programming will help to organize the many functions of the center around a more focused set of ideas and concepts. Additionally, rotating themes make the center an inviting collaborator to a wide array of groups and individuals - themes are an invitation for those with a shared interest to participate.

Efforts are underway to identify a theme for Fall 2024 and to solicit input on future theme ideas.

Recommendation #4 - Create opportunities for fellows and affiliates

While the center should have many collaborators, it will be critical to create opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and community members to formally associate themselves with the center.

Initially a small cohort of undergraduate student fellows, funded through the Learning Aligned Employment Program (LAEP) are expected to join the center in Fall 2024. Creating additional opportunities will expand the center's capacity to support programming of all kinds.

Recommendation #5 - Interactive elements that foreground sound

This recommendation responds to the recurring suggestion that the center should have hands-on interactive exhibits that provide an introduction to the digital humanities, while also addressing the concerns about noise levels in the space. Interactive elements that respond visually to the audio in the space would be one way of creating opportunities for engagement, while opening up possibilities for presenting a wide variety of content in a dynamic and evolving way.

